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SCOPOPHILIA AND SPECTACLE: FASHION AND FEMININITY IN THE
NOVELS OF FRANCES BURNEY

by

Cheryl Denise Clark

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2010
ABSTRACT
SCOOPHILIA AND SPECTACLE: FASHION AND FEMININITY IN THE
NOVELS OF FRANCES BURNEY

by Cheryl Denise Clark

May 2010

My dissertation investigates how the relationship between looking and being seen, or the interaction between scopophilia and spectacle, intersects with the rise of consumer culture and the ascendance of eighteenth-century fashion and fashionable places. By using Frances Burney’s novels as a lens through which to examine the eighteenth century’s fascination with looking, I consider the ways in which attracting “the look” or gaining attention through the visibility of stylish apparel and goods becomes a pathway to social agency in Burney’s novels. Fashion for Burney, I argue, emerges as a multifaceted system that manifests as a means of as social power that becomes essential in shaping ideas of eighteenth-century femininity and in challenging the existing power structure of the aristocracy. Through successive chapters my project traces how the shopkeeper, the dressmaker, the milliner, the hairdresser, the carriage maker, and the entrepreneurs of pleasure resorts, all help to transform a young woman into a “custom-designed” fashionable lady. The “being seen” object, or the lady of fashion, emerges as an empowered spectacle who not only finds social status through her fashionable displays, but who also becomes a subversive agent in the social realm.
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2010
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank The University of Southern Mississippi’s English Department faculty, both past and present, for providing a stimulating academic environment, and for helping to secure financial support through graduate teaching assistantships and various awards. I am especially grateful for USM’s generous Doctoral Fellowship that provided the funding and time to conduct my research. I acknowledge with pleasure my positive experiences exploring Bath’s Museum of Costume, the Victoria and Albert Museum’s fashion displays, the British Library’s vast resources, Maidstone’s Tyrwhitt-Drake Carriage Museum, the Tunbridge Wells Museum, and Greenwich’s Fan Museum.

I would like to particularly thank, Anne Wallace, whose classes and valuable insight nurtured the seed for this project many years ago during my formative years as a graduate student. My greatest admiration for and gratitude must be expressed to Ellen Weinauer for not only fostering my longstanding interests in fashion, but for heralding high standards for academic and scholarly excellence. I am especially indebted to Nicolle Jordan for shoring up my committee with her critical eye and for offering useful and probing observations. And to Kenneth Watson, I am thankful that he always said yes when asked to help in any way. Ultimately, I must express my profound gratitude to my most inspiring mentor, David Wheeler, for kindling my love for eighteenth-century literature, for listening to countless hours of questions, for motivating me when I was discouraged, and especially, for going beyond the call of duty by serving faithfully on my committee even after leaving USM. The greatest debt, however, I owe is to Michael Mays. Without his time, energy, insights, encouragement, and discerning critical
suggestions, this project would not have happened. Finally, to my family, I want to express my deepest gratitude: to my sweet mother for giving me the love of reading, who didn’t live to see this project completed, but whom I know is smiling; to my dad, whose hard work and determination taught me to follow my dreams; to Laura, my beautiful daughter and best friend, for acting as my cheerleader and for providing a twenty-hour-a-day support center; and last, but certainly not least, to my husband, Sherriel, for sharing with me the joys and burdens of domestic and academic life, for listening patiently to my frustrations, for crying with me through disappointments and losses, for rejoicing with me in the successes, and ultimately for sustaining me with his humor, optimism, support, and love.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Moving into a new house turned out to be the defining moment that paved the way for Frances Burney to become, as Samuel Johnson labeled her, the great little spy of the eighteenth century. In autumn 1774, the Burney family changed from their residence on Queen’s Street to Sir Isaac Newton’s former house on St. Martin’s Street, in the heart of London’s social life. Nicknaming her new home “The Observatory,” because of the small room enclosed by windows that Newton built on top of the house, Burney utilized this space to watch London’s fashionable society. But she also used this hideaway to record what she witnessed and to secretly write her first novel. The observatory with its significant view of fashionable people travelling to and from the opera and theatre became an important place for Burney. As a spectator, she not only scrutinized society, but she also recognized the mesmerizing effect that fashionable society had on her as an observer. Hence, the relationship between observation and display, or seeing and being seen, surface as key points of interest for Burney.

During the formative years of early childhood, Burney faced tensions in her family. Born into a musical heritage, yet lacking musical talent, she endured the constant taunting of her five gifted siblings. Eight-year-old Burney also had an undiagnosed eye condition that kept her from learning to read and earned her the title of the family dunce. This vision problem compounded with her self-determination, however, resulted in an accentuated mental acuity that enabled Burney to recall conversations verbatim and to recite passages from Shakespeare, Pope, and Dryden after hearing them read only once. With her phenomenal memory and her astute ability to capture details, her family’s
acquaintances often appear as colorful characters in her novels and overheard conversations resurface as lively novelistic dialogue. Even with the early hindrances, Burney learned to maneuver around criticisms and problems and eventually exceeded her family’s musical popularity.

Burney’s resistance, both to social constraints and expectations of women, started at a young age. Her father, Dr. Charles Burney, encouraged his children to develop interests in the arts, theatre, music, and literature, while frivolous reading, including novels, was forbidden and replaced with devotional meditations and other literature for female improvement. One of the most popular and influential conduct-book writers was James Fordyce, whose *Sermons to Young Women* Burney knew well. Fordyce promoted men’s superiority and women’s inferiority, and emphasized restraint as the key to proper female conduct. Wit in women and education, beyond what was deemed proper to look after the needs of men, were strictly opposed. Anything outside the purview of the home, such as commerce and politics, was solely under the province of men. In spite of the restrictions promulgated by conduct books that left few opportunities for women, Burney became increasingly conscious of her unique talents. The claims of women’s intellectual inferiority also conflicted with her growing awareness of her own advanced intelligence.

In an early display of self-resolve, Burney rebelled against her father’s rules about female education. Guided by instruction from conduct books in his library, Dr. Burney believed that women should have enough education to make them capable of polite conversation, which would enable them to find either a husband or employment as a governess. He adamantly opposed a formal education or classical learning for his daughters. But young Burney had different aspirations. At eleven, she taught herself
French and Latin by reading Dante, Petrarch, and Voltaire in the original languages. Her propensity to write—behavior thought to be unbecoming for a young girl—emerged as well in her early teen years. By the age of fifteen, Burney had a collection of works that included elegies, stories, odes, verses, and plays.¹

Throughout her life, Burney continually struggled to negotiate socially acceptable behavior and her tendency toward independent thinking and actions. Her stronger contentions and objections focus on relationships, marriage, and social customs. Despite her sense of obedience to her father, for example, she adamantly refused to marry anyone other than the person of her own choosing.² At the age of thirty-four, Burney realized the financial burden her single status put on her father. When her father found a financial opportunity for her, she felt obligated to accept the appointment to the Court of George III as Second Keeper of the Robes to Queen Charlotte. Living as a domestic servant in isolation from her family and friends for five years, she chronicled every beckoning call of the Queen and catalogued the rigid schedule of dressing and undressing that placed great physical and emotional demands on her. Despite the social pressures, Burney did not marry until she was forty-one. In the same nonconformist style as she did everything else, when she finally married, she created an uproar in her family. Her father even refused to attend the wedding when she married, Alexandre d’Arblay, a Catholic French soldier during the French Revolution when tensions between England and France were escalating.³

Along with her family difficulties, Burney witnessed social tensions between individuals struggling to elevate their social status.⁴ In one such incident she observed her father’s attempts to overcome his humble background as he aspired to be part of higher
society. Originally from the MacBurney’s, an aristocratic Scottish bloodline and members of the court of James I, Charles Burney’s father was disinherited and ostracized from the family for his pursuit of the theatre and his elopement with an actress. With opportunities available to earn income, Charles worked hard to reclaim this lost status for his family. His musical skills allowed him to sample life in the upper echelons of society, but his access waxed and waned according to his patrons, health issues, employment opportunities, and family encumbrances. At one point, with income from new wealthy clientele, he bought a private coach for his family. This purchase was a huge step for the Burneys, as they now travelled through the streets of London and witnessed how attitudes toward them changed.

As her father’s personal secretary and social companion, Burney mingled with his affluent patrons and clients in their literary and social circles. Burney’s awareness of her inferior education and her fluctuating class position made her uncomfortable in literary coteries. She recognized, however, the power embedded in social acceptance and the importance of circulating among people who called themselves fashionable society. With her access to these social circles, which increasingly included individuals from a broader spectrum of society, she witnessed the rivalry between aristocracy and the ever-more mobile middling classes. The vying for social power between inherited bloodlines and earned income became evident to Burney as she witnessed social friction among women of these competing classes.

One such upper middling class woman who befriended her, and at the same time snubbed her, was Hester Thrale. Despite Thrale’s hereditary link to a celebrated Welsh family, her marriage was arranged to help the deteriorating finances of her family. As the
wife of a successful brewer, Thrale socialized among the upper echelons of Georgian society. Yet because of the unpredictable profits from her husband’s brewery and because he lacked any connections to the aristocracy, Thrale, too, struggled to fit in among the members who had inherited land, wealth, and peerage. Once while Thrale and Burney visited Brighton, Burney witnessed Thrale finagle the Duchess of Ancaster out of her honored seat at the dedication of a ship. Despite the Duchess’s distress at attempting to watch the ceremony from behind her, Thrale ignored her. Later Thrale explained her behavior to Burney: “I never give way to folks because they are people of Quality…I never got any thing from them, so why should they from me?” (ELJ III 387-8). Thrale’s efforts to assert superiority were not only aimed against members of the aristocracy, but also pointed toward anyone she sensed threatened her own social position.

Thrale was often dismissive of the Burney family’s lack of social clout. She referred to them as “a very low race of mortals” and commented that “[Dr. Burney’s] daughter is a graceful looking Girl, but ‘tis the Grace of an Actress not a Woman of Fashion” (Thraliana 369). Although not a member of the upper social circles, Burney attended assembly rooms, London’s pleasure gardens, the opera, the theatre, and other leisure-time amusements alongside people of fashion. She even accompanied the Thrales on visits to Brighton, Tunbridge, and when journeying to Bath, she recorded her exciting trip in their coach and four with a post chaise behind for Mrs. Thrale’s two maids. As she became more immersed in Thrale’s social circles, she found increasing pleasure in her massive popularity and her new position in the Thrale social set. She wrote to her sister: “I am prodigiously in Fashion” (ELJ 35). Even Dr. Burney benefited from his daughter’s new associations. He noted in his memoirs that he is “now at the Top of the Ton. He is
continually invited to all the great Tables, and parties, to meet the Wits and Grandees” (Memoirs 170). To top off these recent accomplishments and much to his satisfaction, he was finally invited to the Court of George III, the same social place his ancestors enjoyed. As Thrle notes, obviously the Burneys are not in the same class as people of fashion, but Burney observed how appearances and visiting the same places as people of fashion help to carve out a social status in Georgian England. Hence, inBurney’s world possessing material goods and participating in popular amusements are an important part of negotiating social status.

Despite the obstacles of her familial conflicts, gender, and class, Frances Burney became one of the most popular and highly respected authors of the eighteenth century. Her achievement in the literary world includes four novels, Evelina: or The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World (1778); Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress (1782); Camilla: or a Picture of Youth (1796); The Wanderer: or Female Difficulties (1814); eight plays—four tragedies and four comedies; and the highly criticized publication of her father’s journals, Memoirs of Doctor Burney. Famous in her lifetime as a novelist, Burney also became celebrated as a diarist and a chronicler of her age with her massive collection of journals, diaries, and letters that stretch from 1768 until her death in 1840. In the wake of such novelists as Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Samuel Richardson, Burney provides us with critique of class and gender relations told for the first time from a feminine viewpoint, a viewpoint cultivated not only from the upstairs seclusion provided through her observatory, but also from the downstairs space of social interaction.
While upstairs of Burney’s new home offered her a distancing perspective on fashionable society, downstairs provided a large elegant space for socializing with the great artists and fascinating guests who infiltrated the Burney household. Downstairs was not only the site of numerous parties and concerts that entertained the influx of illustrious musicians, actors, writers, and singers, but it was also a place for Burney to observe first-hand the inner workings of the social realm. Regular guests included the celebrated actor David Garrick, who routinely stopped by in his make-up and wig to practice his lines before heading for the theatre. Another visitor that created a stir in the Burney household was Omai, a native of the Society Islands. Omai travelled around London with Burney’s brother James after being taken aboard the Adventure, the ship where James served under Captain Cooke. Burney describes her amazement of how dressing Omai in a Manchester velvet suit with lace ruffles converted him from a native savage into quite the English gentleman. Through Omai’s transformation, Burney witnessed how fashionable clothes permitted him to participate in England’s social society.

The visitor who made perhaps the most lasting impression on Burney was the Italian soprano, Lucrezia Agujari. She intrigued Burney not only with her extraordinary talent, but also with her independence and ability to earn her own income. During Agujari’s visit to the Burney’s home, Burney explains that her family and friends were “excessively eager to hear her sing, but it was not convenient to offer her her Pantheon-price of 50 Guineas a song” (JL 35). By negotiating her own contract to sing at the Pantheon, Agujari demonstrated her autonomy and her capacity to manage her career and finances. This domination in her field was a remarkable step and was partly made possible through the unique creation of the social amusement, the Pantheon.
The newly constructed Pantheon arguably would not have existed without the significant role women played not only as contributors of the entertainment, but also as financial investors. One of the primary figures responsible for the development of this new venue was Margaretta Maria Ellice, a wealthy single woman who socialized in fashionable circles. Promising to provide the financial support for such an undertaking, Ellice invested £10,000 and persuaded Philip Elias Turst to construct an elaborate rotunda or dome similar to that of the mosque of Santa Sophia in Constantinople. With this ambitious undertaking, she hoped to provide a venue suitable for nobility that would serve as preferred entertainment for the winter season. But when the costs of construction escalated, Ellice withdrew any further financial support. Turst refused to abort the project and resorted to selling shares to the builders and crafters, making them directly involved as shareholders and investors. Burney’s father invested in this venture and purchased shares that he assumed would allow his family to attend this social hotspot.

Figure 1. The Rotunda at the Pantheon.
Wanting to promote this socializing playground as an exclusive social space, however, the Proprietors of Oxford Street Pantheon devised a ‘Plan’ to limit attendance to an elite audience. The idea was that no one could hold a subscription to the Pantheon without the invitation and endorsement of a peeress. That a peeress, a woman who held a title, should decide who could join this fashionable venue was certainly an unprecedented regulation. A ticket, similar to a lady’s calling card, acted as a membership card and admitted ladies into this fashionable place. This gender-specific rule immediately created controversy and ignited a battle of the sexes. According to the Public Advertiser even members of the House of Lords were refused admission without the permission of their wives, and the editorial declared that the Pantheon was under “Petticoat-Government” (13 December 1771). This unique stipulation, coupled with the extravagant architecture, the lavish décor, and the circular design, created an ideal setting to highlight fashionable women. Massive colonnades supported tiered galleries that surrounded and overlooked the assembly room floor. As women walked around the assembly room to display the latest fashions, male spectators looked on to admire them.

While the remark that the Pantheon was under “Petticoat-Government” was meant to be a slur and intended to discourage such regulations, it illustrates, instead, the power women possessed in the emerging realm of fashionable society. Agujari as a professional woman in charge of her own career, Ellice as a female proprietor of a public amusement, and the female influence of peeresses who permitted or denied access to amusements underscore the prominence of women in the social realm of the eighteenth century. More importantly, these empowered women highlight the rising female agency made possible through the display of fashionable goods in public places of entertainment.
If we can imagine Burney sitting in her observatory with her eagle’s eye view of fashionably dressed individuals sauntering to popular amusements, and if we can envision her capturing in detail what and who she observes downstairs, we can see how observation and display became useful tools in Burney’s hand. As we look closer at the social world that surrounds Burney, we see how the emphasis on visual display surfaces as a central concern for her. What we see through Burney’s eyes is the dynamic interplay between the observing subject and the observed object and how this relationship undergirds a growing scopophilic drive. In fact, the complex interaction between scopophilia and spectacle or seeing and being seen emerges as an important component of eighteenth-century culture. Taken from the Greek *skopein* meaning “to look” and *philein* meaning “to love,” scopophilia literally means the love of looking in which one derives pleasure. This eighteenth-century preoccupation with looking manifested itself in many ways, as Roy Porter points out: “Objects certainly fascinated the Georgians; they loved touring stately homes and factories, inspecting machinery, peering down microscopes, going to museums and galleries, travelling, collecting curios. Yet they were also mobile, valuing the freedom money gave for activity, and enjoying being out of doors and on the move” (225). That people found pleasure in seeing as they obtained increasing means of mobility and amusement underscores the scopophilic drive of the eighteenth century. Much in the same way that individuals experienced pleasure in looking at miniature and distant worlds, collections of butterflies, and country estates, seeing fashionable goods became increasingly popular.

Viewing an object for pleasure, however, reflects only one aspect in the process of looking. In order for an individual to receive pleasure in looking, an object must
capture the subject’s attention. Consequently, the attention an object receives or being “the seen” object surfaces as another key component of looking. Georgians soon realized that seeing fashionable objects and places was not the only source of pleasure in their leisure time activities; they recognized that appearing in fashion objects or being seen as a fashionable person brought pleasure as well. Thus, a complex relationship emerges between the spectator, or the one who is looking and receiving pleasure, and the spectacle, or the object receiving the attention. It is this energetic interaction between seeing and being seen or the relationship between subject and object that becomes the driving point of my dissertation.

My project investigates how the interplay between a subject who sees and the object that receives attention, or the interaction between scopophilia and spectacle, intersects with the ascendance of eighteenth-century fashion and fashionable places. By using Burney’s novels as a lens through which to examine the eighteenth century’s scopophilic drive, I explore how the dynamics between a rising consumer culture and the ascendance of the visual display of fashion underpins the fascination with looking. With the influx of material goods and with visibility available through fashion, the relationship between seeing a fashion item and being seen in fashion becomes a means to consider the complex relationship between spectator and spectacle.

Given Burney’s experience with the Pantheon-like atmosphere provided by her home, it is not surprising that Burney places the social world at the center of her novels and turns to fashion as the mediating ground for gender and social relations which were in flux in the eighteenth century. Fashion for Burney, I argue, emerges as a multifaceted system that becomes a valuable social tool, one that develops into a means of gaining
social power. Regardless of an individual’s social class, it is how one appears in Burney’s world and where one spends leisure time that are crucial elements for establishing a social position. In fact, fashion and fashionable venues appear as social networking centers that challenge the existing power structure of the aristocracy. For instance, after young country-girl Evelina learns to dress in fashion and makes a trip to the hairdresser, she successfully mingle in London’s social circles and captures the attention of wealthy aristocrat Lord Orville. In Burney’s social mecca the experience of seeing and being seen not only influences shifting class relations, but also is instrumental in shaping ideas of eighteenth-century femininity.

Burney’s works open the doors of English society and give us a lens to follow women in their quest to gain membership in the social realm through their display of fashionable attire through leisure-time amusements. Fashion and fashionable venues, thus, produce spaces and create visible roles for women. Attracting “the look” or gaining attention through the stylish apparel and goods becomes a pathway to social power for Burney’s women. With fashion as an undermining force that helps to erode class distinctions, women, regardless of class, seem to be interested in carving out a place for themselves in a world of fashion. In turn, places of entertainment that showcase women—the Pantheon for instance—become sites of increasing feminine agency. Through her female characters circulating in leisure time amusements and through their display of fashion, Burney’s works show us the dynamic relationship between the observer and observed. The “seen” object, or the lady of fashion, emerges as an empowered spectacle who not only finds social clout through her fashionable displays, but who also turns into a subversive agent in the social realm.
In order to fit in this new social structure, however, women adopt fashions from each other, creating not a trickle-down imitation, but an interweaving emulation that reaches through various classes. Previous scholarship addressing the ascendancy and the solidification of middling classes relies heavily on the emulation theory as posed by such historians as Harold Perkins, Roy Porter, Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and Margaret Hunt suggests that the availability of financial resources ignited the middling classes’ desires to be like or to mimic the upper classes. Perkins argues that the eighteenth century experiences social stability because each lower social rank adopted or mimicked the station above them, thereby creating a mobile, but stable social order. Porter agrees that money and private gain permitted individual mobility throughout the middle ranks, but instead of stability, he claims that the mobility of classes created a cauldron of change. Similarly, McKendrick contends that “it was increasingly accepted that man was a consuming animal with boundless appetites to follow fashion, to emulate his betters, to seek social advance through spending, to achieve vertical social mobility through possessions” (25).

However, in Burney’s world of fashion, instead of an emulation that stabilizes society, we see a social realm in flux constantly changing to seize whatever is in fashion. Rather than a vertical emulation in which lower and middling classes attempt to mimic the fashions of their betters, we see women from the upper class actually adopting styles of the lower classes. In one instance, Lady Louisa, a young lady from the upper echelons of society, names someone notably beneath her class as one of the leading people of the fashionable society. Evidently impressed with Lovel’s style, she even asks for fashion advice. Lady Louisa’s remark emphasizes that the world of fashion is not only an
inclusive place, but that even members of the upper class look to individuals beneath their class for fashion ideas. With upper classes adopting styles of lower classes, and with the lower classes wearing second-hand clothing of their betters, and with fashion changing from what individuals see others wearing, this zigzagging movement of fashion creates a space for inclusivity in the social world.

Instead of an “exclusive elite,” as Ingrid Tague and Hannah Grieg argue, Burney’s representation of the *beau monde* encompasses a vast array of individuals from across social classes who compete for social status through their display of fashion. In fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary’s* first reference in 1714 from Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* explains the *beau monde* as “the fashionable world, or society” without any indication of a particular social class. Interestingly, the word *ton* also first appears around 1770 and means “the fashion, the vogue, the mode; and people of fashion or fashionable society” also without any specification of a particular class. In fact, one of the word’s first appearances in the *OED* cites the episode from Burney’s first novel, *Evelina*, and the afore mentioned exchange between Lady Louisa and Lovel.

For Burney, what seems to matter in the *beau monde* is not birth or whether one belongs to the upper class or the middling classes, but whether one is aware of, can purchase, and follow or set the fashion of the day. Burney goes to great lengths in her novels to specifically describe the *ton*, the people who compose the *beau monde*. In *Cecilia*, Mr. Gosport describes to Cecilia the diversity among the types of women who make up the *ton*, but he goes on to explain that despite their differences they have one common interest: “At home they think of nothing but dress, abroad, of nothing but admiration, and that everywhere they hold in supreme contempt all but themselves” (40).
Mr. Gosport’s observation reveals that regardless of their diverse classes, women’s interest in dress and desire for admiration unite them under the umbrella of fashion.

Not only does Burney’s employment of fashion illuminate women’s increasing social advancement through their accumulation and display of material goods, but her works also show how fashion and fashionable venues enable women to engage in active, empowering public roles that disrupt the eighteenth-century’s growing assumptions about femininity. Alongside the scientific investigations and philosophical discourses that speculated on the emotional, intellectual, physical, and moral differences between men and women, conduct books, devotional meditations, and other manuals emerged to help solidify a culturally constructed image of an ideal woman. These instructions dictated social and domestic demeanor, including what constituted virtuous behavior, acceptable conversation topics, letter writing methods, appropriate leisure activities, proper dress, duties prior to marriage, duties for marriage, duties of middle life, and duties in the decline of life. These texts instructed young women to conform to the idea of natural inferiority and indoctrinated them to suppress individual desire. The primary strategies of these instructional manuals were to convince women to recognize and embrace their God-ordained subservience and naturally endowed inferiority. For instance, in *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1799) Thomas Gisborne states:

> There are numerous rules of moral obligation, which attach equally on women of either class; rules which respect fundamental principles of action, dispositions of the heart, the cultivation of understanding, the employment of time, and various other particulars essential to subservient excellence and usefulness of character. (4)
Gisborne claims that in order for women to be considered of good character they are to “daily and hourly” attend to the comforts of the male sex, including fathers, husbands, brothers, other relations, and friends (8-10). He further explains that the tasks of legislation, jurisprudence, philosophy, and economics are assigned entirely to men because God has given the male intellectual superiority. God compensated their mental defect by giving women “symmetry, elegance and grace,” therefore, Divine Will commands women to fulfill the duties of a domestic role. 

Burney’s female characters, however, go against these social standards and venture beyond their “God-ordained” domestic sphere.

Rather than women who sit sequestered in the parlor knitting, sewing, drawing, and painting, which were acceptable female activities, Burney’s female characters delight in sights, sounds, amusements, and fashionable goods, and engage in shopping, dressing, travelling, and leisure-time amusements. Their interest in fashion, the stylish flourish of expensive accessories, the creative design of dresses that displayed elaborate portions of fabric, the towering hair styles, the independent means of travel in elaborate carriages, and their participation in public entertainments all seem to embody a language of their own, a language that bespeaks a new pathway to an elevated social status and that forges perceptions of femininity in which a fashionable woman emerges as the creation of and consumer of fashionable goods.

By looking at a brief overview of Burney’s novels, we can see how the social world and its attention to fashion outline a narrative pathway for Burney’s female characters. One of the most obvious features of Burney’s novels is the uprooting of her young heroines from the country, whether it is a rural setting or a foreign country—as in
the case of her last novel—and thrusting them into the unfamiliar arena of city life. But most importantly, their introduction into unfamiliar spaces equals their initiation into the world of fashion through which they experience the fluidity of social status and the empowering role of fashionable women.

Burney’s first novel, *Evelina; or The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (1778) chronicles a young, orphaned girl’s journey from obscurity to distinction among London’s social circles. As the unacknowledged daughter of the wealthy Sir John Belmont, Evelina has lived in the country under the watchful care of Reverend Villars. His affluent patron, Lady Howard, advises Villars to send Evelina to London with her daughter, Mrs. Mirvan, a lady who socializes in London’s fashionable circles. Despite her previous seclusion from London and her questionable class status, Evelina mingle[s] in social circles after she learns to shop and dress in fashionable attire. As Evelina attends balls, dances, and pleasure resorts, she witnesses how the appearance of material wealth provides diverse classes’ access to London’s social circles and their fashionable amusements. In the end, it is not her birth connection to an aristocratic family that provides her inclusion in fashionable amusements, but her created appearance through fashionable attire.

Burney shows us the diversity and instability within a society that fixates on fashion in her second novel, *Cecilia; or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782). This novel charts the experiences of a young, orphaned country girl who is propelled into a multi-faceted fashion-obsessed London society. After the death of her prosperous country parents, Cecilia spends four years under the watchful care of her doting uncle. Within several months of receiving her legal inheritance, her uncle dies, leaving her entrusted to three
“Londonized” guardians. Under the assumed shelter of her male protectors, she encounters the snobbish and corrupted aristocracy with the Delviles, the extravagant excesses of the middle class with the Harrels, and the parsimonious practices of the rising merchant class with Mr. Briggs. While each of these incidents shows Cecilia a different perspective on fashionable society, her most significant experience occurs with Priscilla Harrel and the fashionable ladies, Miss Leeson and Miss Larolles. Cecilia observes women struggling to keep up the appearances of wealth by travelling in stylish carriages and by being seen circulating at fashionable amusements. She learns that regardless of a woman’s financial means how one appears in public is the key element to establishing and maintaining a social status.\(^{16}\)

In her third novel, *Camilla; or A Picture of Youth* (1796), dressing in fashion and obtaining fashionable objects emerge as a source of social power for women, as they appear in the latest styles and competitively display their fashionable attire. As we follow Camilla through over nine hundred pages of various social situations, this young daughter of a country parson leaves behind her country parsonage and travels to the popular shopping resort, Tunbridge Wells, and the fashionable shopping town, Southampton. In visiting resort towns, Camilla discovers how objects on display in shops exert a certain degree of power over the consumer. In shopping, dressing, and participating in popular forms of amusements, Camilla and the socialites, Mrs. Arlbery, Mrs. Berlinton, Indiana, and Lady Alithea Selmore, also become objects of male observation. Yet these women find empowerment through their display of fashionable apparel and through their domination at these social gatherings. These leisure time amusements also cultivate fierce
competition between women who are contending for distinction in this world of fashion consciousness.

In her fourth and final novel, *The Wanderer; or Female Difficulties* (1814), Burney is still exploring the growing anxieties about the disruptions in the social structure and the competition that occurs among women in fashionable society. Set during the time of the French Revolution, *The Wanderer* presents the story of a young, destitute orphaned French émigré—also the unacknowledged daughter of an English lord—who arrives on England’s shores disguised as a black slave-girl. Ironically, Juliet escapes the clutches of the terrifying events of France only to fall victim to the social prejudices and rivalry of England’s fashionable society. Necessity forces her to obtain work, but by entering the workforce as a shop-girl and milliner’s apprentice, she learns the hardships of trying to obtain daily subsistence within the restricted opportunities for young women in a circumscribed social system. In telling this story, Burney accentuates the female difficulties that are perpetrated by women who are obsessed with public appearances and social status. Juliet’s most devastating situations are the direct result of vicious women who attempt to maintain their reputation and social status through enforcing the boundaries of their fashionable social circles.

Despite Burney’s popularity in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, her novels remained in obscurity until the 1950s work of Joyce Hemlow. Hemlow’s comprehensive study provided an analysis of how Burney’s works echoed the rigid female codes found in eighteenth-century courtesy books and conduct manuals. But in the wake of feminist theory, critics began to consider Burney’s novels as a source of feminist discourse against women’s compliance to eighteenth-century propriety. Rose
Marie Cutting argues that Burney’s strong-willed heroines show her growing rebellion against the restrictions placed on women. Similarly, Judith Newton suggests by emphasizing female power and ability, not female subjugation, Burney’s novels become a site of protest, especially against women being placed on display in the marriage market. Yet other critics take issue with Burney being heralded as a radical, rebellious writer. Agreeing with Hemlow’s assessment, Katharine Rogers contends that while Burney may enact a quiet protest, it is neither conscious, clear-cut, nor consistent, and in the end Burney upholds the status quo. Similarly, Deborah Ross and Claudia Johnson see Burney as a writer who upholds conservative views. In fact, Johnson argues that Burney is certainly not a social critic and does not challenge the existing system. Instead, Johnson claims Burney upholds traditional notions of gender so much so that her heroines appear abject.¹⁷

In this sense, critics often interpret Burney as either a conservative who endorses women conforming to social expectations or a rebellious feminist who opposes traditional conventions of femininity. However, instead of defining Burney as either a conformist or a radical writer, I would suggest that the unresolved tensions in her works allow us to see Burney as an eighteenth-century female writer struggling to reject the frustrating limitations of women while trying to balance her own sense of duty to comply with stifling expectations. By focusing on the social realm and its preoccupations with leisure time amusements, Burney exploits the power embedded in fashion and fashionable venues and uses it to her characters’ advantage. The image she portrays of women actively participating in the social realm resists the image of women as victims of male oppression. Yet while embracing this autonomy, Burney’s characters comply with
moral and ethical expectations, as reflected in conduct books. In other words, Burney’s women are strong-willed active participants in the public realm who display a spirit of independent thinking, but still uphold virtuous conduct.

Whereas Burney’s heroines all differ in childhood backgrounds and all have uncertain or ambiguous class positions, the common thread that links them together is their previous isolation from England’s *beau monde*. Each young girl must leave a place unassociated with fashionable pursuits and learn to navigate the world of fashion. Not only are Burney’s heroines dependent on appearances, but other female characters also concern themselves with public visibility. Inclusion in the *beau monde* and its fashionable pursuits becomes a direct benefit of appearing as a lady of fashion.

Participating in the social world provides an alternative to the confinement of the domestic parlor, but being a member of the *beau monde* is not without pitfalls and problems. While embracing fashion creates opportunities that enable women to overcome certain restrictions, the fashion-driven world subjects them to its own rules and regulations. Burney’s female characters repeatedly encounter obstacles in trying to belong to the fashion world and often incur enormous debt through their competition to surpass each other. Sometimes they live on the brink of starvation or financial ruin merely to keep up the appearance of wealth. And perhaps the most disturbing behavior happens when women instigate harsh attacks on each other in their attempt to keep social circles closed. Despite the snares, the fashion world with its public venues liberates Burney’s female characters from the containment of eighteenth-century dominant ideology that attempted to create a natural association between women and domestic
affairs. In short, Burney’s social realm enables women to achieve a certain degree of independence and control over their actions that they would not otherwise possess.

In much the same way that Burney’s characters experience a changing world, Burney lived in a period of unprecedented expansion of the national economy and transformation of daily life. From the 1660 Restoration of the Stuart monarch to the Napoleonic wars, England experienced cataclysmic changes and interruptions in its social and economic structure. Revolutions advocating freedom, Enlightenment philosophy, religious debates, political upheavals, land enclosures, scientific enquiries, urbanization, and the advent of industrialization all infiltrated the social network of England’s class structure. The change in economic circumstances brought about by exploration, colonization, trade, and industrialization created new sources of wealth for a burgeoning British society. Both domestic manufacturing and trade, such as clothing, silver cutlery, and pottery, and opportunities driven by empire and the plunder of foreign nations, such as importing tea from India and sugar from the Caribbean, created more ways to make money.

The growing accumulation of money into more hands changed the structure of the social system by challenging the traditional balance of power. Both Neil McKendrick and Roy Porter have influentially argued that an increase in prosperity to a greater portion of Georgian society meant more people had access to material goods. As a result, money and its purchasing power uprooted aristocratic claims to authority and power based on birth and land ownership. The movement of money between different levels of society and the availability of goods destabilized previous distinctive class lines based upon
equating one’s social position with birth. Accordingly, blood lineage then vies with individual worth based on one’s ability to earn wealth and accumulate consumer goods.

Consequently, buying habits and the purchasing of particular material goods came to be shaped and driven by cultural considerations. In other words, the goods or services in which an individual invests time, attention, and income accrued cultural meanings. Part of this meaning is tied to the past when material goods available only to royalty and symbolic of their power and status were used to communicate their supremacy throughout their domains and to foreign lands. But with the influx of goods and the spread of wealth across a broader spectrum of individuals, goods become tokens in the status game. When Burney’s character Priscilla Harrel marries into money, she shifts from living in a small country house to one of the most elegant residences in London. In order to establish her new social status, “shopping and dressing” and “parties of pleasure, and public places” make up her daily routine (32). For Priscilla, material goods and services become a valuable indicator of her new social position.

Whereas goods, such as clothing and shoes, were once purchased for necessity or practicality, the visual appeal of goods created a different interaction between the good and the consumer prior to the moment of purchase and after it. In examining the relationship between the rise of fashionable goods and consumer culture, both Grant McCracken and Neil McKendrick note that goods once purchased merely for their utility, now were wanted for fashionability. In other words, what became most important was not the material good, its durability, its functionality, or the service itself, but how consumers imagine that particular object or service will shape public conceptions of them. Consumers, such as Burney’s character, Priscilla, used these
meanings to carve out a place for themselves in the social world. Thus, the battle of status competition in which goods served to create and maintain social status ensued, and social emulation emerged as individuals struggled to create a social status through their visual display of material goods.  

Crucial to my examination of the relationship between the rise of consumer culture, the ascendance of visual display, and the scopophilic drive of the eighteenth century are concepts of vision, perception, and attention. Visual theory that explores the link between perception and attention, such as art historian Jonathan Crary undertakes, offers a useful way to understand the vexed relationship between the spectator, who is the attentive subject who looks at an object and the spectacle, which is the viewed object that receives attention. In *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Crary maps out a historical construction of vision in which he argues that “seeing” is not a linear progression of representational practices. In other words, seeing is not merely a projection of geometrical shapes and colors displayed on a surface. Instead, he formulates a “phenomena of the observer” as a transformation of the “seeing” subject, one who only receives the transmission of images, to an observing subject, one who is constituted and governed by subjective interpretation. Seeing thus is no longer solely about the image of an outside object merely being transmitted into an image inside the observer’s eye. This transformation to subjective observation and the relocating of vision within the observer’s body explains an emerging complicated relationship between a spectator and spectacle. If vision and meaning about what one sees is interpreted within observer, then the object that one sees has a profound effect on the observer. Crary’s theory helps us to understand how the visual aspect and appeal of
fashion and fashionable goods is instrumental in considering the dynamic relationship between the observer of fashion and the displayer of fashion.

Furthering his interests in vision in *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, Crary tackles shifting and intersecting concepts of perception, attention, and vision. As he points out, the etymology of the word attention “implies the possibility of a fixation, of holding something in wonder or contemplation, in which the attentive subject is both immobile and ungrounded” (10). As Crary sees it, controlling the observer’s attention through external techniques of manipulation and stimulation, the object, not the observer, becomes invested with power. Crary then turns to Guy Debord’s theories of “a society of spectacle” and traces how Debord’s assumptions are relevant to his proposal of attention. For Debord, the formation of spectacle depends on the attraction and management of attention and renders bodies controllable; as a consequence, attention becomes the central component for an object to obtain a form of power.

Attention, according to Crary, is the key element that produces changes in the relationship between the object and the observer. During observation, the observing subject modulates into an attentive subject, and in doing so, the external object gains control over the attentive subject. Through the stimuli of the external object, the subject becomes captivated through the attention placed on the object and power shifts from the attentive subject to the observed object. Crary’s assessment of spectacle and the relationship between attention and power is useful in understanding how fashion becomes a valuable social tool for obtaining social power. With fashion concerning itself with appearance, what one sees and how something looks become essential components
of fashion’s energy. Fashionable objects gain control of an individual’s attention to the point that the attentive subject is captivated by the object or fashionable spectacle under observation. For instance, Burney’s character, Camilla, experiences this kind of captivating attention as she walks the Pantiles and sees Tunbridge ware in the shop’s window displays. Even though she cannot actually afford these fashion items, the allurement of social prestige that she imagines they will provide for her causes her to buy them anyway. Thus, in obtaining and keeping her attention and thereby creating desire, the object becomes invested with power. When we consider Crary’s concept of vision and see how the attention that an object receives imbues it with power, it seems plausible that visual display is instrumental in Camilla’s compulsive consumption. In other words, it is the power embedded in the display of Tunbridge ware and the visibility of what that fashion object communicates or will communicate to others determines her behavior.

If we can appreciate how fashionable objects captivate an individual’s attention to the point that an individual is controlled by that object, then it seems plausible to consider how women dressed as spectacles of fashion can also captivate an individual’s attention to the point that the attentive subject’s actions are controlled by her. This assumption is manifested in Burney’s character, Lord Merton, an aristocratic young man who immerses himself in London’s social circles. He confesses that the only reason he attends pleasure amusements is not for the places, but for the “objects of beauty” or women that he sees. Lord Merton’s attention is captivated by fashionable ladies, and he rambles from place to place following women in order to look at their displays of beauty. That Merton visits these places because of the women he hopes to see
demonstrates how women who hold his attention and control his actions are invested with captivating power. In this sense, Burney’s women make themselves desirable objects and rely on their appearance to gain attention. In short, the visibility through fashion provides a way for female objectification to become empowering and thereby objectification becomes a means for women to gain agency in the social realm.

Taking their lead from prototypical eighteenth-century feminists, including Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah More, and Mary Astell, contemporary feminists, such as Mary Poovey, Claudia Johnson, and Nancy Armstrong contend that not only does objectification devalue women, but that the female mind is sacrificed at the expense of reason and intellect. While women’s objectification as a form of power runs counter to feminist criticism such as this, current trends in sex-positive and lipstick feminism questions previous feminist assumptions and practices that focus solely on objectification as a dubious or troubling form of power. Critics who embrace sex-positive feminism see women deriving their power from their appearance as a valid and legitimate method to challenge their subordination to men. Such criticism eschews femininity as passive and submissive and therefore associates the female body’s ability to attract men as a form of power and sexual allure as a source of power over men.

Camilla Paglia refuses to see women as sex-object victims of male oppressors; instead, she argues: “Woman is the dominant sex. Woman’s sexual glamour has bewitched and destroyed men since Delilah and Helen of Troy” (10). Using Madonna as an exemplar of how a woman can use her body and adornments to exercise control over her life, she argues that Madonna shows young women “how to be attractive, sensual, energetic, ambitious, aggressive, and funny—all at the same time. Changing her costume
and hair color virtually every month, Madonna embodies the eternal values of beauty and pleasure” (4-5). 22 Similarly, Nickianne Moody’s investigation of the ways in which feminist theory has informed and complemented popular culture studies complements Paglia’s view of Madonna. In fact, she sees Madonna’s controversial image, her promotion of sexual expression, and notable success, as the new face of feminism. Furthering the idea of female objectification as a source of empowerment, Linda Williams examines the career of Annie Sprinkle as she works as a masseuse, prostitute, performer in burlesque and live sex shows, and pornographic star. Williams shows how Sprinkle’s sexual performances challenge the view that women are powerless victims of male sexual power. Williams argues that because Sprinkle chooses to participate in such displays and finds pleasure and satisfaction in being in control, she acts as an agent instead of objectified victim.

Lipstick feminism also challenges the perception that feminine adornments are tools of oppression imposed on women by men and looks at the ways in which women employ embellishments to complement the female body. Interestingly, in Teresa Riordan’s historical investigation of beauty items, such as lipstick and the Victorian hoop crinoline skirt, she discovers that the entrepreneurs of such devices have been women themselves. She suggests that far from being instruments of oppression, beauty enhancements are used by women to manipulate the masculine eye. Inventions, such as cosmetics, depilatories, shape-altering clothing, and foundational garments (bustles, corsets, push-up bras) allow women to change from something they are born with into something they can impose on themselves. She contends: “In deploying these implements, women have empowered themselves just as surely as did Catherine Beecher,
who unlike her father and brother, was unable to channel her ambition into religious scholarship during the nineteenth century. So Beecher pioneered a new path to power for women: that of domestic goddess” (xviii). Whereas Beecher extols the role of domestic life and her glorified woman finds empowerment through her work in the home, the adorned woman emphasizes her body and enhances her appearance through artificial means finds empowerment through her ability to capture a man’s attention.

If we consider the way in which Crary’s explains attention as an empowering mechanism and if we can appreciate female adornment as a means to captivate attention, then we can see how fashion serves as an axis in the relationship between the observer and the observed. As Burney’s young women learn to select and dress in fashion and circulate among social circles displaying their adorned bodies, they intentionally draw attention to themselves. By capturing a spectator’s attention through their appearance and by making themselves spectacles, they demonstrate how fashion’s visible trait becomes a controlling device. In other words, as spectacles of fashion, Burney’s women use their bodies and adornments to captivate their male spectators’ attention. As a result, they control the actions and behavior of their audience and eventually gain governance over their male spectators.

The rise of consumer culture with its increasing availability of material goods made fashion a useful means for Burney to explore the instabilities of class and gender relations of the eighteenth century. Fashion manifests in Burney’s works through four interconnected and progressive categories: selection, appearance, circulation, and display. In learning how to select fashionable attire through shopping, in dressing for the proper appearance, in travelling in style to circulate among fashionable society, and in
displaying fashionable apparel in pleasure resorts, Burney’s female characters gain access into fashionable social circles. By focusing on selection, appearance, circulation, and display in individual chapters, my project traces the ways in which these elements of fashion are interwoven and dispersed throughout Burney’s novels. I examine how social power for women resides in being seen and in how one appears in fashionable society. While men do participate in Burney’s world of fashion, they appear only as appendages and function on the margins of this social realm that is powered through female agency. In fact, Burney satirizes men who do pay close attention to fashion by dressing them up as fops or emasculating them. In this sense, devaluing men who attempt to use their bodies as a source of power underscores that objectification through fashionable means is a feminine source of empowerment. Yet, critics such as D. Grant Campbell note, that the developments in the social realm are not without frictions, and growing anxieties emerge about the fluid state of the social hierarchy and the disrupting roles of women as agents of social change.  

Considering Burney’s reputation for detailed accounts and descriptions, her meticulous attention to detail, and her astute ability to recall conversations, the fact that Burney provides so little specific detail about the shops, the clothing that her women display, the carriages they ride in, and the pleasure resorts where they visit diverts attention away from fashionable goods and places and enables us to see how these objects and places of fashion recast social positions and notions of femininity. Instead of directing her lens of observation toward the material objects themselves, Burney focuses our attention on her female characters and their experiences in this world of fashion. But in order to understand the social and culture significance of the emergence of a consumer
society and its relationship to the visibility of fashionable goods and venues, my project will explore in detail the changes in shopping practices and marketing strategies, the influx of new styles, fabrics and accessories, the innovations in new designs of transportation, and the booming development of pleasure resorts and how these changes interact with and reshape concepts of social class and the social construction of femininity.

Through successive chapters my project traces how the shopkeeper, the dressmaker, the milliner, the hairdresser, the carriage maker, and the entrepreneurs of pleasure resorts all help to transform a young woman into a “custom-designed” fashionable lady of the *beau monde*. Using the four elements in the power structure of fashion, selection, appearance, circulation, and display, my project maps out the pathway to Burney’s world of fashion. From the scopophilia embedded in shopping adventures, women learn to select fashionable apparel that helps initiate their entrance into the world of fashion. Through the interweaving emulation that occurs among women across class lines dressing in stylish apparel, ladies of fashion gain admiration from their male spectators. By travelling in stylish carriages, women circulate among social circles and create a prestigious social status that disrupts previous notions of social positions. But it is in pleasure amusements where these various threads of fashion come together so that women can dramatize their newly discovered sense of empowerment and autonomy. Through their display of fashion and in their performance in pleasure resorts, Burney’s women emerge as empowered spectacles of fashion.

My second chapter, “Shopping: Learning the Art of Selection,” investigates how shopping and shops in Burney’s world become a social space for working out social
relations based on selecting visually displayed material goods. Burney’s shopping scenes give us an inside glimpse into the changing marketing strategies associated with an emerging consumer culture. Shifting from the traditional method of buying necessary supplies at the market for practical reasons, shopping emerges as a process of looking and selecting fashionable articles based on visual aesthetics and cultural meaning. Through such means as window display cases and floor room shows, visual displays help to shape and create desire for fashionable objects. Whether it is Evelina learning the process of looking, comparing, and selecting an object for its fashionability, or Mrs. Mittin’s “routing over the goods” for a bargain, or Miss Dennel’s obsession with the mesmerizing objects on display, their participation in these shopping practices shows us the different dimensions of scopophilia that are entrenched in shopping. Thus, seeing and selecting fashionable items in Burney’s world becomes a gateway into the *beau monde*.

Chapter III, “Dressing Like a Lady: Acquiring the Proper Appearance,” examines how the seemingly mundane daily activity of dressing can transform an ordinary young woman into a fashionable lady of the *beau monde*. Drawn from all across the social spectrum of eighteenth-century society, Burney’s women learn to dress in fashionable attire, and in doing so, blur class distinctions. With women adopting the latest styles, as disseminated through visual displays in shop windows, showrooms, fashion dolls, and fashion magazines, fashion spreads across class lines and produces a horizontal emulation. In examining the changing designs and fabric, we learn how certain styles not only literally shape the physical image of a woman, but they also reshape concepts of eighteenth-century femininity. By focusing on women in fashionable attire, Burney shows how proper appearance endows her female characters with power to capture the
attention of spectators. Dressing, thereby, becomes a means of communication and social agency that disrupts previous social boundaries.

My fourth chapter, “Travelling in Style: Circulating Social Status,” examines how carriages appear not only as a form of transportation for women to and from fashionable amusements, but also as fashionable accessories that help to establish social status. From the English countryside to lavish London balls, women are “on the go” and obsessed with how they travel. While the tempo for fashion and fashionable entertainment was set in London, it soon spread to neighboring towns. To circulate in social circles means to be seen among elegant company in fashionable venues and travelling to seasonal events that occurred in fashionable spas and resorts like Bath, Lyme Regis, and Brighton. Scenes from Burney’s novels show women traveling in the prestigious chaise-and-four-postillions, the open curricle that was sportive and fast, the cheaper-made gig, the luxurious barouche with a collapsible roof, or the highly visible phaeton that women preferred to drive about the parks to show off their latest fashions. By riding in certain carriages, these women gain a sense of empowerment long with the freedom of movement associated with independent travel. Carrying these women on a carefully orchestrated journey into fashionable society, these carriages also create and convey social status.

Chapter V, “Walking the Circuit: Display and Power in England’s Pleasure Resorts,” brings together the public nature of fashion and femininity. It is here in the social realm of pleasure gardens, spa resorts, and assembly rooms that we witness the final product of fashion’s process. With the main attraction “to be seen” promenading and socializing among other fashionable people, these public entertainments highlight women
and place them in the spotlight. Through such venues, these novels place fashionable
dressed women in the public limelight, a place that helps to establish their status through
their attendance and what they display on their bodies. However, these spectacles of
fashion intentionally make themselves desirable objects of attention. From the
fashionable assemblies in Ranelagh’s great rotunda to the shady avenues and vistas of
Vauxhall, the visibility of Burney’s fashionable women operates as a prominent feature
for creating pleasure and amusement in public diversions. But by holding the gaze of
male spectators, these women gain a sense of empowerment as they become the main
attraction and dominate the attention of their male observer. Just as other objects of
fashion create desire and hold power over the consumer, Burney’s spectacles of fashion
create admiration and hold power over their male spectators.

Burney places her vast array of female characters amidst rapidly commercializing
spaces in which the rise and display of fashion emerges as a complex system of power.
Through their acquisition and display of fashionable goods, Burney’s women, or these
“spectacles of fashion” demonstrate how fashionable displays become manifested as a
source of social power. Acquiring and exhibiting fashionable goods serve as means for
these women to destabilize a social hierarchy that equates worth and social position
solely on birth and heritage. Fashion serves as the undermining force that blurs class
distinction, as is evidenced by the formation of a new social class, the beau monde. In
order to fit in this new social structure, women adopt fashions from each other, creating a
horizontal emulation that reaches across various classes. Burney’s women also challenge
eighteenth-century images of femininity as socially constructed through didactic
discourses. Instead of domestic women confined in their drawing rooms, Burney shows
us women who are active agents in the social realm of the fashion world. Despite the objectification that becomes woven into the fabric of the eighteenth-century world of fashion, Burney shows us how the spectacle of a fashionable constructed woman empowers them and offers them opportunities to act as subversive agents within the social realm.

Notes

1 Burney had a volatile relationship with her stepmother. After her stepmother discovers her writing, Burney makes a bonfire of all of her juvenilia. This collection, Burney tells us in her journals, included a manuscript for *The History of Caroline Evelyn*, the predecessor to her future first published novel, *Evelina*. Burney chronicles her efforts to stop writing. She depicts her attempts as “illaudable because fruitless,” as she describes herself as being afflicted with “cacoethes scribendi” an incurable itch to write. Nine months later, she starts keeping a journal, a custom she continues for the next seventy years. Burney’s conflict between writing and female propriety have been addressed by various critics. Kristina Straub’s *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1987) addresses the ambiguity of the Burney’s texts in which Burney is trying to reconcile her conflicting roles as woman and writer. Julia Epstein’s *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women’s Writings* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989), discusses the differences between socially accepted letter writing and journal writing as opposed to public writing. “If a woman wrote in order to support herself or to assert her intellect, she defied propriety in the eighteenth-century’s gender economy; on the other hand, if she wrote for private expression, using a genre by definition (but not by fact) destined for private audiences only she did not transgress against the virtues of modesty, obedience, decorum, and silence” (48). More recently Betty Schellenberg’s *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), challenges such scholarship and argues that “as a writer emerging in the later 1770s, [Burney] deliberately chose the developing model of the literary professional as a means of fashioning a coherent public identity” (144). She goes on to say that this authorial identity in some ways freed her from the limitation of eighteenth-century femininity. Also Patricia Meyer Spacks’s *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976), maps out similarities between Burney’s letters and journals and her novels. She argues, “More clearly than Fanny Burney’s letters and diaries, the novels betray her anger at the female condition…The Burney female characters face endless struggles between what they want to have (independence, specific husbands, pleasure, work) and what they want to be (angelically perfect): between the impulses to action and to avoidance” (189).

2 In one such instance, her family sets her up with Mr. Thomas Barlow. After he attempts several times to propose marriage to her, she responds: “‘I had rather a thousand times die an old maid than be married, except from affection’” (47). Barlow refuses to accept her rejection and pushes her further: “‘This is the severest decision! Surely you must allow that the social state is what we were all meant for—that we were created for one another?—that to form such a resolution is contrary to the design of our Being?’” (52). To this pressure Burney demonstrates her ability to speak her own mind and retorts: “‘Well, Sir, You are attached to the married Life—I am to the single—therefore, every man in his humour—do you follow your opinion, --and let me follow mine’” *Frances Burney: Journals and Letters* Eds. Peter Sabor and Lars E. Troide (London: Penguin Books, 2001): 52.

3 Burney’s name is even a point of contention among scholars. While Joyce Hemlow, Kate Chisholm, and Claire Harman all use Burney’s childhood nickname, Fanny, I align myself with Margaret Anne Doody’s assertion that using her nickname seems to diminish her influence. Doody argues, “It make the author sound like the harmless, childish, priggish girl-woman that many critics want her to be…Let her have an
adult name.” Also many scholars tend to favor her married name, Madame d’Arblay since more of her works are either written under this name or were published after her marriage.

4 Claire Harman’s *Fanny Burney: A Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 2000) also claims that even within Burney’s own family there were social tensions. According to Harman, Burney’s stepmother had access to financial resources that she used for her own children, whereas, Burney and her siblings were left to fend for themselves. This situation caused strife between Burney’s sister and her because her stepsisters had more social opportunities.

5 Both Kate Chisholm’s *Fanny Burney: Her Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998) and Harman’s *Fanny Burney: A Biography* provide examples of Thrale’s conflicts with Duchess of Devonshire and members of the Bluestockings.

6 Thrale’s literary circle also competed with the Bluestockings. The Bluestockings included such members as Mrs. Chapone, Elizabeth Carter, and Elizabeth Montague, who attempted to distinguish themselves by their attention to intellectual improvement and pretensions. Wanting to distance their literary group from fashion interests, men were encouraged to wear worsted blue stockings, instead of expensive black silk stockings. This group refused to waste time in playing cards, idle gossip, and attention to fashion. Mrs. Montague, known as the Queen of the Blues, was dismissive of Burney’s novel; however, she supported her own protégé, Hannah More. Later Burney’s play, *The Witlings*, satirizes the Bluestockings.


8 See Frances Burney, *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor (London: Pickering and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 1995). See *Memoirs of Doctor Burney, Arranged from His Own Manuscripts, from Family Papers, and from Personal Recollections, by his daughter, Madame d’Arblay_3 vols. (London: 1832). Supposedly disappointed by what she discovers in her father’s papers after his death, Burney decides that publishing them as they originally appear would not maintain the integrity of the Burney family. She burns, edits, and changes details to blot out family scandals. Instead of producing her father’s manuscripts, she publishes her own version of her father’s life.


10 Agujarri visits the Burney home several times while visiting England. Several months after Burney meets her, she finally performs for them. Burney tells how the five hour concert in their home captivated everyone. But she also comments on Agujarri’s independent mind and actions.

around the idea of scopophilia, or the pleasure in looking, and argue that it is impossible for a female viewer to be a true spectator of film due to the patriarchal nature of the film industry. Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” Visual and Other Pleasures (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989): 14-26 argues that women on screen are only passive objects that merely receive the gaze of male characters, viewers, and cameras, without ever returning the gaze. Ann E. Kaplan’s Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera (New York: Methuen, 1983) argues that a woman can receive scopophilic pleasure from film, but that this is only possible if the female spectator employs a form of transgendered spectatorship.

For Tague it is the “quality” that constitutes the upper echelons of society that help to create this world of fashion. In her discussion of the fashion world, she claims:

When early eighteenth-century writers sought to describe the upper echelons of their society, they most often referred, not to the peerage, the nobility, the aristocracy, or the elite, but to the “Quality”... Unlike the nobility, one did not have to be born with a title to be a member of the Quality... One demonstrated one’s membership in the Quality by knowing how to act in social situations, by revealing taste and gentility. Finally, the term embodies the sense of moral as well as social superiority with which members of this elite viewed themselves. (12-13)

Here Tague’s discussion suggests that even though an elevated birth is not necessary to be part of the ‘quality’, this group distinguishes itself as the elite of society by the acquisition of manners and taste. Similarly, Hannah Greig interprets the beau monde as people of fashion whose material goods, social practices, and cultural preferences were without question ‘quite the fashion’... A study of the practices of the beau monde demonstrates how an exclusive elite retained status during a period of considerable sociopolitical change, and that displays of fashion played a major role in its success. (293)

She, like Tague, argues that elite exclusively forms the people of fashion and through their social and cultural practices retain a sense of social status and stability throughout the changing dynamics of social change. Whether we see fashionable society as Tague’s “the Quality” or Greig’s the beau monde, inclusion in fashionable society meant one acquired certain social practices that helped to distinguished them.

While earlier scholarship seems to promote rigid boundaries that confine women to a domestic space and men to a public space, more nuanced approaches in recent scholarship challenges the dichotomous structure of public/private sphere ideology and sees theses realms as imagined spaces. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall’s Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987) argues in their investigation into manufacturing families that sexual division of labor was within the families and raises interesting questions about the ideological construction of gender. Harriet Guest’s Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1819 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000) provides valuable insight into the gendering of British patriotism. She argues that “it is becoming more difficult to think about a domestic sphere without considering it in the context of the perplexed relations between the public, the private, and gender difference in the eighteenth century” (5). Similarly, Linda Colley’s Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992) traces the activities of women outside the domestic sphere and argues that separate sphere ideology appears to be more prescriptive and idealized than realized and practiced. She differs from other historians who “present this period as one of unambiguous retreat and restriction for women, and from those who would go on to claim that in the nineteenth century women were more restricted to the private sphere than ever before” (263). In fact, she argues that women’s participation in the Revolutionary Wars and political affairs demonstrates that “the boundaries supposedly separating men and women were, in fact, unstable and becoming more so” (250). Also see Amanda Vickery’s The Gentleman’s Daughter, Women’s Lives in Georgian England (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998); Michael McKeon’s The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and The Division of Knowledge (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2005); Nancy Armstrong’s Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (New York: Oxford UP, 1987); and Mary Poovey’s The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984).
affluence. For England, laws reaching back to the fourteenth century and improvised by Queen Elizabeth from lower classes, and it implies that wearing particular clothing could establish or could not wear suggest that nobility used outward apparel as a means to distinguish themselves. Clothing dependent upon one’s social class. These royal edicts and sumptuary laws dictating what one could or could not wear show that nobility used outward apparel as a means to distinguish themselves from lower classes, and it implies that wearing particular clothing could establish a social identity of affluence. For England, laws reaching back to the fourteenth century and improvised by Queen Elizabeth...

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14 These assertions are common through various conduct books or instructional manuals that were popular during the eighteenth century. William Kendrick, The Whole Duty of Woman (Concord: Hough, 1793.) The Polite Lady; or a Course of Female Education in a Series of Letters from a Mother to her Daughter (Philadelphia: Carey, 1798). James Fordyce, Sermons to Young Women, in Two Volumes (London: Cadell and Davies, 1809). The Lady’s Pocket Library: Containing, 1. Miss More’s Essays. 2. Dr. Gregory’s Legacy to his daughters. 3. Lady Pennington’s Unfortunate mother’s advise to her daughters. 4. Rudiments of taste, by the Countess of Carlisle. 5. Mrs. Chapone’s Letter on the government of temper. 6. Swift’s Letter to a young newly married. 7. Moore’s Fables for the female sex. (Chambersburg [Pa]: Printed by Dover & Harper for Matthew Carey, 1797).

15 For critics that examine the complex relationship between a world of goods and the role of women as consumers see G.J. Barker-Benfield’s The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992). She points out that consumer culture motivates sensibility and manner through expression of delicate feeling reflected in consumption of tasteful objects in domesticated homes. She credits women as the leading consumers and contends that their appetites for white bread, tea, china, and plebian versions of glassware, tea sets, and knives transformed England into a nation of shopkeepers. Similarly, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace’s Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Columbia UP, 1997) sees women as primary consumers and participants in the marketplace and looks at the commodities that make up the English lady’s tea table: china, sugar, and tea. She investigates how shopping becomes gendered as feminine behavior and contends that “women’s appetite was diverted toward goods” (13). For Amanda Vickery, visibility in the marketplace plays a key role in setting women apart as primary consumers. “Women and the World of Goods: A Lancashire Consumer and Her Possessions, 1751-81” Consumption and the World of Goods. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993): 274-301, argues that “the stereotypical distinction between the producing man and the consuming woman was endorsed by the visibility and regularity of female shopping, whereas the male consumer escaped general notice because his direct engagement with the market was only intermittent” (281). But for T.H. Breen, the marketplace became a place of empowerment for women. In “The Meaning of Things: Interpreting the Consumer Economy in the Eighteenth Century” in Consumption and the World of Goods. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993): 249-259, despite his focus on American women’s participation in the marketplace of British imports, he points out that “the consumer market may have been a source of female empowerment…The acquisition of goods by women in this economy was an assertive act, a declaration of agency” (256-57).

16 Margaret Anne Doody’s Frances Burney: The Life in the Works views Cecilia as an acute and perceptive analysis of English society in its entirety and complexity.


18 Recognizing the significance of outward apparel, earlier rulers and royalty, such as Queen Elizabeth I, devised sumptuary laws to exclude lower class groups from wearing certain fabrics, colors, and articles of clothing. These restrictive rules gave them limited means to maintain social distinction and stability through outward apparel. According to James Laver’s Costume and Fashion: A Concise History (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), as early as 1200 B.C. Greeks and Romans established rules governing proper clothing dependent upon one’s social class. These royal edicts and sumptuary laws dictating what one could or could not wear suggest that nobility used outward apparel as a means to distinguish themselves from lower classes, and it implies that wearing particular clothing could establish a social identity of affluence. For England, laws reaching back to the fourteenth century and improvised by Queen Elizabeth...
were still in place in the eighteenth century, but were not strictly enforced. Anne Buck’s groundbreaking *Dress in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1979, explores the practical purposes that clothing serves, such as protection from environmental elements, durability, and practicality for work. But she also examines the complex relationship between fashion and society and argues that changing fashions in dress not only expresses changes in society, but fashion also serves as a means for “personal and social expression” (9). Also see Beverly Lemire’s *Dress, Culture, and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997); John Styles’s *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale, UP, 2007).


20 See Harold Perkins’s *The Origins of Modern English Society* (London: Routledge, 1969); Roy Porter’s *English Society in the 18th Century*; Neil McKendrick’s “Consumption: Disease of the Consumer Society”; Whereas John Brewer’s “Commercialization and Politics” delves into the implications between a system of goods and its influence on the shifting social order, arguing that the emergence of the middling classes began to distinguish themselves socially and politically from the upper echelons and the laboring poor. Margaret Hunt’s *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England 1680-1780* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996) provides a compelling analysis for the middle class. She classifies the “middling sort of middling classes” beneath the gentry but above the laboring classes, that is, shopkeepers, manufacturers, civil servants, professionals, those who earn on an average between £80-£150 per year, as opposed to the upper classes who draw in excess of £15,000 per year. Her research and assessment provides a useful resource, and it highlights the immense diversification of this group of people. Other scholarship, however, such as J.C.D Clark’s *English Society 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics during the Ancient Regime* and Clark’s *Revolution and Rebellion: State and Society in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* challenge the emulation thesis and the rise of bourgeois and call for a revision of Georgian/Hanoverian history as proposed by other scholars. Clark denounces an ascendant middle class and argues that an “old order” existed and dominated by title, land, and the church. Recently, Ingrid Tague’s *Women of Quality: Accepting and Contesting Ideals of Femininity in England, 1690-1760* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2002) argues that the impact of commercialization affected the aristocracy to a greater degree than their social inferiors. In fact, she proposes: “Aristocrats had both the wealth and the leisure to participate in the vast array of social diversions and to purchase the many new consumer goods on a scale far greater than their lower-ranking contemporaries could” (12). Also both Colin Campbell’s “Understanding Traditional and Modern Patterns of Consumption in Eighteenth-Century England: A Character-Action Approach” *Consumption in a World of Goods* Eds. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1994): 40-57and LornaWeatherill’s “The Meaning of Consumer Behavior in Late Seventeenth-and-Early Eighteenth-Century England” *Consumption in a World of Goods* Eds. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1994): 206-227 echo concerns about emulation theories and question the assumptions made about the motivation for buying products.

21 This concept of the gaze is in direct opposition to the male gaze as Laura Mulvey proposes in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989). In her analysis of women in mainstream media, she argue that the male gaze imposed upon women, which result in their objectification. Also see Beth Newman’s *Subjects on Display: Psychoanalysis, Social Expectation, and Victorian Femininity* (Athens: Ohio UP, 2004), which argues for an interrelationship between psychoanalytic theory of the gaze alongside social history. In doing so, she traces the Lacian gaze through the construct of Victorian femininity.

22 Although Paglia has radial views on rape that I do not align myself with, her views on objectification seem useful. “Feminists are currently adither over woman’s status as sex object...For me, sexual objectification is a supreme human talent that is indistinguishable from the art impulse” (12).
CHAPTER II

SHOPPING: LEARNING THE ART OF SELECTION

Behind the great glass windows absolutely everything one can think of is neatly, attractively displayed, in such abundance of choice as almost to make one greedy. Now large slipper and shoe-shops for anything from adults down to dolls, can be seen; now fashion-articles or silver or brass shops, boots, guns, glasses, the confectioner’s goodies, the pewterer’s wares, fans, etc…First one passes a watch-making, then a silk or fan store, now a silversmith’s, a china or glass shop…Most of all we admired a stall with Argand lamps, situated in a corner house and forming a really dazzling spectacle. Taken from Sophie in London (1786) (87, 141)

In 1786 Sophie von LaRoche, a rising German novelist and admirer of Frances Burney, visited London to witness first-hand the world of fashion that Burney so keenly describes in Evelina and Cecilia. Throughout her trip, LaRoche kept a meticulous diary to record every moment of her fascinating journey. Along with meeting her literary champion, LaRoche’s second interest was to experience the shopping atmosphere that Burney detailed in her fiction. Sophie Her description in this passage shows how the increasing quantity of material goods displayed creatively in specialty shop windows is something of a novelty for her. As she walks through the streets of London and encounters shop after shop, she offers a detailed sketch of the pleasure she receives from looking. Her rapid snapshots of the various articles, such as slippers, boots, shoes, glasses, silks, and fans, reveal the overwhelming abundance of choice that she sees. Yet when she reaches the Argand lamps, the dazzling spectacle they create captures her attention and incites her admiration.¹
LaRoche’s reverie over the impressive exhibitions suggests it is the shopkeeper’s visual display of the fashion articles that captures the potential consumer or observer’s attention. In addition, the variety of shops which “cunningly” display the fashionable goods whet the shopper’s appetite. Here LaRoche describes the shifting changes in the retail business in which shopping emerges as a complex system of practices and procedures that is predicated on the rise of a consumer culture and shifts in the economic structure. Items once purchased for their usefulness, practicality, and function are now purchased as the result of new marketing strategies that exploit the manipulative power of display. Through the seduction of goods and the attention gained through creating a spectacle, the spectacle incites admiration from the shopper. This type of shopping experience that LaRoche describes in her travel diary seems to replicate the shopping adventures that would have been familiar to her from Burney’s works.²

In fact, Burney’s Evelina seems to provide the basis for LaRoche’s fascination with this recent method of moving from shop to shop for the examination and selection of goods. Evelina writes to Villars and tells of her new activities in the city: “We have been a shopping…all this morning, to buy silks, caps, gauzes, and so forth” explains Evelina, on her first outing to these new shopping venues that London offers (27). To obtain the appropriate appearance for this new environment, Evelina first becomes acquainted with visiting London shops and examining the merchandise. Here Evelina makes it clear that her intention is to learn the process of looking at and comparing the quantity and
quality of items for sale. The outcome is eventually to select and to purchase particular items from the vast array of fashionable goods. This process is significant for all of Burney’s young women, and it also highlights the complex relationship between seeing and being seen. In order to mingle in the beau monde, Burney’s young women must look the part by learning how to select merchandise in an unfamiliar shopping environment such as LaRoche describes and Evelina experiences.

Mrs. Mirvan begins the arduous process of making sure this young, inexperienced rustic displays a proper appearance in London society. As Mrs. Mirvan explains, Evelina must learn to “Londonize” herself (25). What is interesting about Mrs. Mirvan’s term “to Londonize” is that its first Oxford English Dictionary reference appears in 1778, the same date as Burney’s Evelina. According to the OED, to “Londonize” means “to make like London or its inhabitants” (“Londonize,” def. 1). It seems likely that Burney coined this term in Evelina as she attempted to convey the process necessary to fit in fashionable London. The fact that Evelina goes “a shopping” and is learning to “Londonize” herself signals new notions about a young girl’s initiation into the world; in other words, this newly acquired skill of shopping helps to usher her into the fashionable world of London and teaches her how to be like London’s inhabitants. In order to accomplish her induction, Mrs. Mirvan escorts Evelina to the fashionable shopping districts and shows her how to shop in an eighteenth-century urban environment.
As a novice on her first shopping spree, Evelina seems overwhelmed and bedazzled by all the shops and the selection of goods. The shops that she emphasizes are the mercers and the milliners. Eighteenth-century mercers and milliners were people of economic and social importance. Mercers dealt in textile fabrics, especially silks, velvets, and other fine materials and handled a wide range of goods, often not produced in the locality. And milliners were not only sold fancy wares, accessories, and articles of female apparel, but they also designed, made, and sold women’s hats. Here it seems important to point out that each of these terms is in the plural form in Burney’s text, suggesting that Evelina visits multiple shops that display a vast array of goods before selecting the fabric and trimming for her new attire. In the milliner shop she is not only bemused by the variety of silk, but also by the clerks’ sales tactics. She explains: “I thought I should never have chosen a silk, for they produced so many, I knew not which to fix upon, and they recommended them all so strongly, that I fancy they thought I only wanted persuasion to buy every thing they shewed me. And indeed, they took so much trouble that I was almost ashamed I could not” (27). Evelina’s experience reveals that eighteenth-century shopping entails a complex system of looking that includes comparing, rejecting, and selecting merchandise based on something other than selecting goods based upon practical use.

Evelina’s expressed confusion shows this process to be an unusual method for her. Her upbringing in the country, where county markets and fairs are the main form of retail, meant that the shopping method she is accustomed to is one in which individuals simply purchase goods at the market they need without any
exaggerated sales techniques. In these types of markets, merchandise is selected based on its durability and practical use. But here she encounters an atmosphere where clerks present so many choices of luxurious silk that Evelina feels overwhelmed. Even in her first shopping venture, Evelina feels pressured to buy the fashionable items that the clerks present based on the clerks’ explanation of how these items will make her look. And how one looks is an important element in the world of fashionable London.

Through such shopping scenes as Evelina’s, Burney shows us how the changes in eighteenth-century shopping practices seem to emerge in conjunction with the shift toward a consumer culture. This complex system of practices and new marketing strategies places visibility and the attention to looking as central components of the concept of shopping. In this way, the scopophilic nature, or the fascination with looking, embedded in shopping emerges as one of the driving forces behind the changes. While creative visual displays in shop windows attract the attention of potential customers, store designs place goods within the reach of customers and are showcased in elaborate displays inside the shop. Display and visibility thus help to redefine what it means to shop.

Whether it is looking for the latest fashions, looking to copy without the expense, looking for pleasure, or looking to purchase, looking becomes a crucial element of new marketing strategies and of personal selection. The purchasing of goods based on the cultural meaning embedded in those items and what those goods communicate about the consumer signals a shift from buying for necessity. The disjuncture between an item’s price and its value also becomes another facet
in the scopophilic drive of shopping. The established price of an object is displaced by the value that item has in the eye of the consumer. It is not the fashionable item itself that is valued, but rather what the shopper envisions that particular item can provide, whether real or imagined. Through her shopping scenes, Burney exposes how fashion is the driving force behind this focus on display and visibility and how the desire to belong to this world of fashion influences each female character’s life.

From the traditional method of buying practical supplies at the market to the shifting concept of shopping, that is, looking, touching, comparing, rejecting, selecting, and purchasing specific fabrics and fashionable accessories, her female characters give us an inside glimpse into the difficulties and pleasures associated with shopping. In Burney’s novels, shopping is not an end in itself, but a means to an end: a pathway into the world of fashion, a site in which social status can be negotiated or constructed. Through these new venues, such as window displays and show-room floors, women are given a visual presentation that helps to create desires for fashionable objects. In addition to the creative displays in the shopping spaces, women flaunting new fashions influence other women to adopt whatever is the latest style. In this sense, the visibility provided through fashion becomes a driving force in which women buy fashion materials, not for the item itself, but what the fashionable article communicates visually about them. Not only “seeing,” but also “being seen” in fashionable attire emerge in Burney’s novels as crucial components of a woman’s acceptance in a society that is preoccupied with appearances.³
In examining the young parson’s daughter’s shopping ventures in resort towns, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace argues that “Camilla embodies Nancy Armstrong’s definition of the ‘new domestic woman,’ that self-regulating, self-conscious, and self-aware woman who learns through trial and efforts to internalize the new codes of domestic conduct” (93-94). Looking at the same scene, Deidre Shauna Lynch contends that “when [Camilla] arrives in Southampton, it is, the narrator indicates, the demands of decency—and not those of vanity, nor of fashion—that keep Camilla buying” (182). However, I would suggest that it is in fact fashion and women’s desire to fit in fashionable society that influence her shopping choices. When Camilla’s wardrobe, purchased in Tunbridge Wells, begins to lose its appeal, as compared to the other women’s attire in Southampton, she wants to look more updated. Even though she really cannot afford to do so, she shops and purchases a new dress and accessories. Instead of embodying Armstrong’s “self-regulating new domestic women,” Camilla, as well as Burney’s other shopping women, exemplifies the fashionable woman in an emerging consumer culture.

Whether it is Evelina learning the new process of looking, comparing, and selecting, Lady Louisa searching for the latest styles, or Mrs. Arlbery shopping as a leisured amusement, their participation in these emerging shopping practices challenges didactic constructions of eighteenth-century femininity. In fact, Camilla’s, as well as her other female characters’, experience of shopping shows us that fashion is the driving force that shapes notions of femininity and shows women as active participants in their domain of the social realm. Instead of
exemplifying the notions of “the angel in the house,” these women embody dimensions of the rising consumer culture and changing shopping practices. Shops and shopping in Burney’s fashionable world help to reshape perceptions of eighteenth-century femininity and show us how women from different classes attempted to be included in the *beau monde* partly by their acquisition of fashionable goods. 

*Learning “To Shop”*

Before looking at Burney’s shopping scenes more closely, it is important to understand that these novels were written during a period of significant change in the meanings of the terms “shop,” “to shop,” and “shopping” and even the practice of shopping itself. The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the earliest reference to the word “shop” as a noun back to the thirteenth century, when it meant “a house or building where goods are made or prepared for sale” (“shop,” def. 1a). But the verb “to shop” meaning “to visit a shop for the purpose of making purchases, or examining the contents,” first appears in 1764 and for the second time in 1799 (“shop,” def. 4a). As these definitions imply, there was a fundamental cultural shift from the earlier concept of a shop as a place in which essential goods, such as food or fuel, were produced and sold to an engaging activity through which individuals visit multiple shops, examine goods, and purchase merchandise. With its coinage as a verb, shopping became understood as an activity in itself in which purchasing material possessions as contingent on subjective selection.
The rise of a consumer culture interested in material goods based on criteria other than their durability and function also emerges in direct relation to the recent concept of shopping. As Anne Friedberg explains, differences can be identified in old marketing techniques and shopping in a burgeoning consumer society.

Marketing means simply buying items in the marketplace…

Shopping, on the other hand, is a more leisurely examination of goods; its behaviors are more directly determined by desire than need. To Shop: as a verb, it implies choice, empowerment in the relation between looking and having, the act of buying as a willful choice. (57)

Interestingly, the first appearance in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for “shopping” occurs alongside “to shop” in 1764 as a process of moving from one shop to another for ladies’ pastime amusements. The example entry, Zeal’s *Seasonable Alarm London*, states: “Ladies are said to go a Shoping, when, in the Forenoon, sick of themselves, they order the Coach, and are driving from Shop to Shop” (“shop,” def. 4a). As indicated here, the movement from shop to shop reveals the growing number of places that were providing a variety of goods to purchase. However, it also points to an increase in the amount of time needed for moving from one shop to another, plus additional time required to look at goods. This greater amount of time reflects an increasing quantity of leisure time that individuals must have in order to participate in this activity. But here I think that it is important to point out that the passage specifically refers to the individuals
participating in this activity as “ladies.” “Shopping” is, thus, gendered, figured at its emergence as a feminine activity. These linguistic developments in what it means to shop mark a cultural shift from individuals buying goods for basic needs, that is, spending money for practical purposes, to a consumer society in which individuals purchase goods based on choices and desires.

Outdoor Markets to Indoor Shops

Not only do linguistic changes signal shifting motivations for shopping, but there is also a transformation in actual shopping venues from outdoor markets to indoor shops. In addition to Evelina’s shopping experience, Burney gives us in The Wanderer another prime example of this transition that is occurring in small villages. In this novel, Juliet passes through a small village and witnesses the drive toward commerce that begins to take shape:

She walked till she came to the long middle street; when she found that, from solitude, at least, she had nothing more to apprehend.

Carts, wagons, and diligences, were wheeling through the town; market-women were arriving with butter, eggs, and poultry; workmen and manufacturers were trudging to their daily occupations; all was alive and in motion; and commerce, with its hundred hands, was every where opening and spreading its sources of wealth, through its active sisters, ingenuity and industry. (666-667)

In her observation Juliet notes the distinction between women setting up markets with local butter, eggs and poultry, and others engaging in occupational labor. It
is this turn to manufacturing and industry that creates employment opportunities and financial means. But with this turn to commerce and financial opportunities, individuals had less time to spend producing their own clothing and food. In this village, we see women taking food supplies produced through their labor to the market. Instead of solely relying on agricultural products from the field as a source of income, men turned to producing manufactured goods. It is these shifts in economic structure and consumer demand that helped usher in the increase of village shops.

By looking at historical documents, such as excise and population records, Hoh-cheung Mui and Lorna H. Mui claim that shops and shopkeeping begin to replace the popular trade at local fairs and markets in small villages and in urban settings. By the end of the eighteenth century, they argue, fairs had fallen into
disuse and markets were mainly used for local produce (Figure 2). According to the Mui and Mui,

The emergence of small village and town shops in the eighteenth century was a response to changes in the economic structure and in consumer demand…As a larger proportion of workers joined the wage-earning labouring force, patterns of consumption changed and more food and clothes had to be purchased. Where did they shop? Certainly, not at the annual fair. By the eighteenth century, the retail functions of the fair were minimal, confined to trifling articles. Nor is there evidence that the weekly market was a buoyant, flourishing institution…On the other hand, there is evidence of growth in shopkeeping in terms of numbers, types of shops, and methods of distribution. That growth could not have occurred without an increased demand for the kind of services provided by shops, services that were as important to the workers as they were to the middling classes. (150)

It is important to note here that this assessment specifies that the decline in market stalls to shops is the direct result of an increasing volume of people who want the services or material goods. This change, they note, was a direct result of correlating changes to the economic structure and consumer market. They specially point to the middling classes and the laboring classes as necessary components in their supposition. This detail is significant in that it suggests that all classes of eighteenth-century England were instrumental in ushering in the
shift to a consumer society. Their assessment suggests that middling and working classes did not solely depend on producing their own goods, as in previous years of agricultural system. Less time to make their own goods meant they were spending more time in employments that provided more access to money which they used to buy ready-made goods.

Changes such as this took place at an accelerated rate in the growing metropolises. One popular method of shopping originated from individuals offering products and services out of their houses. According to Dorothy Davis, in the early years of the eighteenth century, using a window from the ground floor of a house was a popular way to establish a shop. In her ventures through London, Evelina witnesses first hand these home-based shops. Evelina describes her first visit to the Branghtons silversmith shop located in Snow Hill, a district near Smithfield. She explains how the living quarters are small and inconveniently placed up two flights of stairs, while the shop, situated on the ground floor, is large and commodious. The Branghtons do not live here alone; instead, two rooms on the first level are rented out to Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown. In a similar episode, Evelina and Madame Duval actually take lodgings in a hosier’s shop in Holborn to be near the Branghtons. While this particular venue was not prevalent in the small, rural village due to its small, dispersed population and the small quantity of manufacturing opportunities, urban areas witnessed an abundance of these shops. Carrying a variety of merchandise, shops appeared to help meet the rising demands of the changes occurring simultaneously in the economic structure.
The Power of Display and Desire

This multitude of shops, however, generated a different atmosphere concerning the purchasing of goods. As shops started to outnumber outdoor markets in the same areas that were designated for markets, such as Cheapside and London Bridge, shops eventually migrated west of city and initiated what would later become known as shopping districts (Figure 3). An influx of luxury items instigated specialty shops, and through large plate glass windows displaying these goods, these shops surpassed the small windows in houses. The emergence in Georgian England of new retail spaces meant that city streets began to be lined with retail shops, draperies, millinery, and specialty shops, such as Evelina experiences. Multiple shops carrying fashion goods ignited a competitive spirit among shopkeepers as they scrambled to secure potential shoppers.

Figure 3. Shopping districts.
As Mui and Mui point out, “local shopkeepers vied with each other for customers and sought to match or outdo their competitors” (235). The first order of business was to attract the individual passing by on the street. As LaRoche details for us in her travelogue, this was accomplished through the ostentatious design of their window displays. Grabbing the potential buyer’s attention through the visual display was the first step in enticing the potential buyer to stop and shop.

Figure 4. Fashionable displays in a London shop window.
With the increasing number of shops, new marketing strategies concerned with a consumer oriented society began to surface. Visual presentations enticing individuals to purchase goods based on impulse signals a significant change from individuals buying goods solely on the basis of needs (Figure 4). Roy Porter’s *English Society in the 18th Century* stresses the escalation of shops and shopkeepers and emphasizes Adam Smith’s remark that England was indeed a “nation of shopkeepers.” Porter estimates that “by late in the century [shops] totalled upwards of 170,000,” and he cites Defoe’s insightful, but disappointed observation about the rise of eighteenth-century shops: “I have endeavoured to make some calculation of the number of shop-keepers in this kingdom, but I find it is not to be done—we may as well count the stars” (81, 190). As their number increased, shops developed a distinct format for advertising their type of business. As Claire Walsh points out, “fascia boards, hanging signs, projecting or box windows, and a pointed surround which delineated the boundaries of the premises marked them out as retail shops” (160). While the shop front advertised the business, the shop window marketed the shop’s merchandise and its fashionability. Shopkeepers, handling an assortment of goods, increasingly began to arrange displays of material goods in their windows so that the people strolling at leisure would be tempted to buy (Figure 5). This display of items to entice consumers to buy an article, not necessarily for its use, but rather because they simply see it and want it, is a move toward displaying goods to encourage impulse buying based on the item’s visual appeal.
While the shopping precincts that Evelina experiences and LaRoche describes are located in London, shopping districts spread to pleasure resorts outside of London. One such incident happens when Camilla accepts the fashionable Mrs. Arlbery’s invitation to accompany her to Tunbridge Wells. In order to understand the significance of why Burney places this scene there, it is important to understand the reputation of this pleasure resort and its famous designer goods, Tunbridge ware. J. A. Mackey’s *Journal through England* explains the carnivalesque environment and the social inclusiveness of this emerging fashionable resort: “the Rendez-vous of all the Gentry of the
Neighboring County, and the best Citizens Families in London during the Summer Season’; men and women drank the waters ‘in Dishabille’ [casual attire] and appeared in the shady ‘Walks in the greatest Splendor’ while music played” (56-7). Not only do the country gentry, but also the leading people in London mingle here.

As with other popular resorts, Tunbridge became all the rage for its rich mineral baths as well as the health benefits offered by drinking of its water. But Tunbridge also became increasingly visited because of its fashion interests. Scores of people visited for the fashionable walk, the Pantiles, with its shady walks canopying the various shops. According to A. Hamilton’s Memoirs of the Comte de Gramont, “since Tunbridge Wells was close to London (and not too far from France), it was famous for ‘all manner of Toys, Lace, Fans, Ribbons, Gloves and Stockings” (292). While there were certainly shops displaying all of these goods and more, one of this spa’s most sought after objects was Tunbridge ware. And it is the social distinction one receives in owning these specific designer goods that instigated individuals’ visiting and shopping expeditions.

Dating as far back as the middle of the seventeenth century, the Tunbridge ware industry was established and steadily increased throughout the eighteenth century. The town of Tunbridge Wells actually developed around the spa water, and with visitors came the opportunity for craftsmen to display and sell their wares. Elaborate mosaics, such as floral patterns, animals, birds, butterflies, were made from local trees and used to decorate all types of wooden ware. The excellent selection of trees gave the craftsmen a special range of colors that
helped to make their products unique. Especially popular was the vast array of boxes: writing boxes, document boxes, work boxes, glove boxes, and tea caddies (Figure 6). The best-seller, perhaps, was the gentleman’s vanity box, which included accessories for grooming, such as a compact, brushes, and such. As with other fashionable goods, the time needed to create such handcrafts along with the quality and workmanship conferred on the owner an elegance and distinction that transcended the object itself. Interestingly, by the end of the eighteenth century, a demand for ladies’ traveling or vanity boxes supplanted and outsold the earlier eighteenth-century gentlemen’s vanity box. These boxes were often created from expensive mahogany while the inner containers for make-up or jewelry were crafted from cut crystal and covered with silver lids. These elaborate handcrafts were purchased as souvenirs, but used to express the social standing of the owner.9

In this context, it is understandable, then, that Burney chooses Tunbridge Wells for an episode that reveals how individuals succumb to these powerful fashionable objects and how the price of designer goods does not prevent customers from buying them. As Camilla and Miss Dennel stroll through the Pantiles, the shop windows provide amusement for Camilla, but they are “a wonder and delight” for Miss Dennel: she “kept her mouth open, and her head jerking from object to object, so incessantly, that she saw nothing distinctly” (394). Controlled by the allure of the fashionable goods, Miss Dennel appears in a hypnotic state. While these fashionable objects do not mesmerize Camilla to this extent, she does find herself in a predicament.
Camilla has been admiring the “beauty and ingenuity of the Tunbridge ware,” and she just happens to select some articles for “keep-sakes” to purchase what she “imagines” will be “about half a crown,” but they end up costing her “a guinea” (395). With the absence of price tags, Camilla can only estimate what the items will cost; however, instead of refusing to purchase these objects, she decides in the next shop “to put nothing apart as a buyer, till she had inquired its price” (395). But she wants the Tunbridge ware strongly enough to pay more than she really can afford. She leaves this shop and proceeds to the milliner to purchase proper attire for the evening’s events; she tells the milliner “to choose for her what she thought fashionable that was most reasonable” (396). She makes a mistake in assuming that the milliner will make inexpensive selections for her;
instead, the milliner chooses visually appealing apparel and accessories that prove “too pretty to disapprove.” Camilla’s failure to make her own selections results in a cost three times higher than what she “imagined” (396). Here the visual presentation of material goods incites Camilla’s desire. Even though she could refuse to pay the required amount, her desire, based on the visual appeal of these fashionable goods and what these items communicate about her social standing, overrides her pocketbook and her determination.

![Image of a shopping scene](image)

Figure 7. Shopping at the millinery.

We encounter a similar episode in *Cecilia* when Miss Larolles wants to introduce Cecilia to her milliner, who handles unusual fashion articles from
France. To stimulate Cecilia’s interest, Miss Larolles explains the variety of merchandise that her milliner carries: “She has all Paris in her disposal; the sweetest caps! the most beautiful trimmings! and her ribbons are quite divine! …She makes such sweet things, ‘tis impossible to pay her too much for them” (29). Miss Larolles is interested in her milliner because of the fashionable objects that she offers for sale: the caps, trimmings, ribbons. These “sweet things” are so charming and appealing that she feels it would be impossible to overpay for them. The value implied here certainly resides in how this object will help or enable her to look more fashionable (Figure 7).

In these scenes, shopping correlates a woman’s consumption of attractive goods with the way in which a woman envisions these fashions on her, even to the point that she is willing to pay any price. The changing practices of shopping, as represented in Burney, show how through this process fashionable objects create desires. If we look at the role of fashion and the individuals who are helping this transformation take place, we can see how shopping for fashionable goods establishes a new form of social power that becomes available to individuals who have purchasing power. In other words, the latest styles and accessories that fashionable women desire becomes valued for their access to the circles of high life.

On the contrary, both Andrea Henderson’s “Burney’s The Wanderer and Early-Nineteenth Century Commodity Fetishism” and Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace suggest that the reason behind Camilla’s kind of consumption is a result of value being placed in the commodity itself. For Kowaleski-Wallace, the
convergence of the commodity or object and its inseparability to luxury is the crucial moment when shopping takes on a distinct process. She argues that “shopping—unlike marketing or other forms of buying—entails the purchase of what is desirable but not indispensable” (77). And for her, this transformation occurs as shoppers search for three very specific commodities: coffee/tea, tobacco, and sugar. Once considered a luxury, these products now are sought on a regular basis to satisfy new consumer practices and desires.

For Henderson, the second half of eighteenth century ushered in new methods in fixing prices, and fixed cash sales began replacing negotiating prices and bartering. She argues that “these changes had important social ramifications: fixed prices eliminated the need for negotiation, and cash sales permitted a more anonymous relationship between buyer and seller” (7). As a result, the buyer fixed on the commodity and the commodity targeted the buyer’s desires, making the value reside in objects themselves instead of from a negotiated price or necessity. Instead of the buyer’s possible social position being an influential factor, an individual’s buying power plus the desire for the object determines the sale. As Henderson puts it, “both buyers and sellers came to presume that the value of goods themselves, and not social relations, established price” (8).

However, while it seems plausible that buyers purchase what is desirable and that fixed prices certainly helped to establish a portion of the item’s value, what seems to be missing in both of these arguments is how the new emphasis on marketing fashionable items actually creates desires, instead of satisfying wants. It is not the commodity or the fashionable item itself that is valued, but what that
particular item can provide for the consumer, whether real or imagined. Here I would suggest that it is not the item itself, but how buyers imagine the fashionable article will impact their social status. Another point of interest that Henderson seems to sidestep is that with fixed prices shopkeepers show no deference to potential buyers. Preset prices assume not only customers have similar access to buying power, but that if they really want the item, they will purchase it, regardless of the price, as we see in Camilla’s shopping excursion.

“Just Looking”: Looking for the Latest Style

After drawing potential consumers into the shop, shopkeepers also set about to showcase the goods inside in creative ways instead of waiting to bring goods from the back of the shop for the buyer to see. As Burney represents it, the placement of material goods within reach of the customer ushered in different aspects of the “just looking” method, which underscores the scopophilic nature of shopping. Some facets of the looking process, however, created problems for the struggling retailer. In The Wanderer, Burney gives us a behind-the-scenes glimpse of retail shopping in which goods are placed within sight and reach of customers. Juliet’s behind-the-counter ordeals reveal the difficulty of dealing with the people of fashion who are searching for the latest style. She describes her experience of working in the milliner’s shop. She finds herself in a whirl of hurry, bustle, loquacity, and interruptions. Customers pressed upon customers; goods taken down merely to be put up again; cheapened but to be rejected;
admired but to be looked at again, and left; and only bought when, to all appearance, they were undervalued and despised. (426)

Here she depicts the chaotic frenzy that occurs when customers frantically try to make sure they have the latest fashions. Juliet sees how women that admire particular objects try to seem uninterested and attempt to diminish the item. But even after their efforts to ignore the object, they are unable to ignore their fascination with the article and finally purchase it. She goes on to claim:

the good of a nation, the interest of society, the welfare of a family, could with difficulty have appeared of higher importance than the choice of a ribbon, or the set of a cap; and scarcely any calamity under heaven could excite looks of deeper horror or despair, than any mistake committed in the arrangement of a feather or a flower. (426)

By describing these incidents as a devastating crisis and by suggesting that the choice of a fashionable article is as important as making decisions about “the good of a nation,” she exposes the significance that women place on selecting a fashionable item. Juliet also explains that to be seen as fashionable these women want to be sure they are wearing and displaying the proper designs. In addition to revealing these women’s concerns, Juliet also depicts fashion’s emerging power. The fashionability available through wearing these ribbons, bows, feathers, and caps tempts these women to enter the shop to look and to select items that are the latest fashion.
Juliet’s other encounter with retailing occurs in Gabriella’s haberdashery in London in which she again witnesses how goods become valued not for their use, but for their fashionability. In this episode, she also details the difficulties perpetrated by women of fashion on shopkeepers. Each morning Juliet and Gabriella prepared the shop for customers and arranged items to attract people and entice them into the haberdashery. Juliet explains how Gabriella’s own integrity seems to make her the dupe of the artifices of those with whom she had to deal…New to the mighty difference between buying and selling; to the necessity of having at hand more stores than may probably be wanted, for avoiding the risk of losing customers from having fewer; and to the usage of rating at an imaginary value whatever is in vogue, in order to repair the losses incurred from the failure of obtaining the intrinsic worth of what is old-fashioned or faulty. (623)

Juliet exposes the problems that shopkeepers must handle because of the uncontrollable changing of fashions. Gabriella has to be sure she has plenty of merchandise for customers, but at the same time, an overstock would mean a loss of profit because whatever is in fashion one day could change by the next. Then these goods would have to be sold at a discount because they would be conceived as out-of-date.

Gabriella also has to deal with accidentally damaged merchandise that she must sell at a discounted price or discard. Such an incident happens when a lady customer sends for her to bring fashionable goods to her home. Gabriella places
the merchandise in a band-box, and returns without selling any of her wares. Yet “everything had been examined, deranged, and tossed about” (637). Even when she manages to successfully negotiate the varying seasons and the varying modes, she has problems obtaining payment from her debtors. Through Burney’s portrayal of retailing, she shows how women obsess over being in fashion because of the social power found in dressing smartly. Women flock to the milliner in order to dress in the style of the day. No other thought seems to occupy their minds, except securing fashionable attire. Through Burney’s peek into an eighteenth-century shop, she shows us a shopkeeper bent on creating a whimsical world of fashion as women attempt to obtain the latest designs.

*Looking for an Imitation*

Camilla’s shopping venture in Southampton, however, reveals a totally different experience from Evelina’s introduction to looking at fashionable goods or Juliet’s experience with consumers who are frantically trying to select the latest fashions. Unlike Evelina’s fashionable guide, Mrs. Mirvan, who accompanies her and helps her to make the transition into this new process, Camilla’s shopping partner, Mrs. Mittin, convinces Camilla to visit the shops along High Street with her goal being to “see all that was smartest, without the expense of buying any thing” (606). Mrs. Mittin seeks to merely visit the shops for the specific purpose of “just looking” at the “various commodities exposed to sale” (607). Entering the shops on the pretence of asking about sightseeing possibilities in town, Mrs. Mittin examines all the goods within sight or reach and walks out without a single purchase. The fundamental difference between
Mrs. Mirvan’s and Mrs. Mittin’s shopping techniques is that Mrs. Mirvan shops for the purpose of purchasing fashionable goods, while Mrs. Mittin goes shopping merely to see the newest styles. Mrs. Mittin’s looking means that she can see the “smartest” fashions, and because of her skill as a milliner, she can emulate the latest fashions through inexpensive fabrics and trimmings (Figure 8).

The dissimilarity between these women’s shopping methods can be traced back to their upbringing and in their access to financial resources. As shopping practices began to change, not everyone who wished to acquire fashionable articles had the means to purchase them from the rising expensive shops. Thus, women like Mrs. Mittin learn to acquire style without the expense. As the daughter of Lady Howard, a member of the wealthy country gentry, Mrs. Mirvan...
has been exposed to and participated in the circles of fashion since childhood. In visiting London each season, she knows the importance of shopping for and selecting fashionable appearance. On the contrary, the former apprentice to a small country milliner, Mrs. Mittin, befriended a sick elderly gentlewoman, who, on her death bed, left Mrs. Mittin a small legacy. Even though this money provided her an opportunity to leave her position as an apprentice and helped to set herself up as a “gentlewoman,” that is, a gentlewoman of her own conception, the annuity was not enough for complete independence. As a result, she is reduced to making herself useful and “her rage for popularity included every rank and class of society” (688). She would

work, read, go of errands, or cook a dinner; be a parasite, a spy, an attendant, a drudge; keep a secret, or spread a report; incite a quarrel, or coax contending parties into peace; invent any expedient, and execute any scheme…all with the pretext to oblige others, but all, in fact, for simple egotism. (688-89)

Even though Mrs. Mittin does not belong to fashionable society, she is willing to submit herself to anything that gives her a small window of opportunity into social circles. She wants to be part of the inner group, so she attempts to participate in shopping, as she sees it, and manages to maneuver to a certain degree among fashionable people.

However, Mrs. Mittin’s “just looking” approach, or what Andrea Henderson’s “Commerce and Masochistic Desire in the 1790s: Frances Burney’s Camilla” calls her “unorthodox form of shopping” creates suspicion among the
shopkeepers and causes chaos on High Street (75). While Lynch contends that Mrs. Mittin’s problem is that she has “jumped the gun on one stage of consumer revolution” (180), Harriet Guest argues that Mrs. Mittin’s “just looking” approach without making any purchases is a form of “shoplifting…because she is replete with all the ‘sensible gratification’ the goods can give her, and she has thus, in some sense, erased their value, their desirability” (78-79). She argues that women like Mrs. Mittin take pleasure in shopping as an end in itself. Perhaps the commotion that Mrs. Mittin triggers could be explained by the fact that as she enters the shops she asks for directions to sightseeing possibilities. But as she walks out of the shop door, she totally ignores the shopkeepers’ directions, and she goes in the opposite direction into another shop. Certainly, since she is ignoring directions about sightseeing opportunities that she inquires about, this behavior would raise suspicions about her intentions.

And instead of one that has “jumped the gun” on a dimension of consumer revolution, arguably, she embodies a different aspect of it. Realizing the social power that resides in purchasing and owning material possessions, she uses these shopping ventures to her advantage. She sees what is the latest fashion, so in her small economy, she can adopt them in a cheaper way. In other episodes, Burney shows us how Mrs. Mittin manages to maneuver on the margins of fashionable society because of her ability to imitate the latest styles. And it seems that instead of stealing, she has in fact conquered one of the fundamentals of consumer society; she has learned to look the part without laying out extra expense. Instead of these fashionable objects losing their “desirability,” as Guest suggests, she
acknowledges fashion’s power in her quest to obtain similar items. In fact, Mrs. Mittin convinces Camilla that her fashionable goods have lost their luster and encourages Camilla to give them to her. By purchasing less expensive goods from street vendors, she remakes fashionable attire within her meager financial resources, and she goes in style.

Looking for Pleasure

Another aspect of the “just looking” of the consumer revolution is manifested as a leisure time activity for women. Daniel Defoe’s *The Complete English Tradesman* weighs in on this new aspect of shopping:

I have heard, that some Ladies, and those too persons of good note, have taken their coaches and spent a whole afternoon in *Ludgate Street, or Covent Garden*, only to divert themselves in going from one mercer’s shop to another, to look upon their fine silks, and to rattle and banter the shopkeepers, having not so much the least occasion, much less the intention, to buy anything; nay, not so much as carrying any money out with them to buy anything if they fancied it. (1: 104)

This type of behavior perplexes Defoe. He cannot seem to understand the reason behind a woman ordering her coach to town merely to look at fashionable goods. In fact, he specifically points out that these women do not even carry any money with them on the chance they might find something to buy. Whereas Defoe understands visiting a shop to make purchases based on need, he resists these new emerging concepts of shopping. Similarly, in an edition of *The Spectator,*
Rebecca, a china seller, writes to complain about a “Club of Female Rakes,” as she calls them, who routinely visit her shop, sometimes even two to three times a day:

These rakes are your idle Ladies of Fashion, who having nothing to do but employ themselves in tumbling over my Ware. One of these No-Customers (for by the way seldom or never buy any thing) calls for a Set of Tea Dishes, another for a Basin, a third for my best Green Tea, and even to the Punchbowl there’s scarce a Piece in my Shop but must be displac’d and the whole Agreeable Architecture disorder’d, so that I can compare ‘em to nothing but the Night-Goblins that take a Pleasure to over-turn the Disposition of Plates and Dishes in the kitchens of your housewifely Maids. (95)
Whether these women, like Mrs. Mittin, are “routing” over the articles to get ideas on how to look fashionable through less expensive means, or if they are only looking over the articles just to pass the time, it seems for these women that going from shop to shop and looking over fashionable merchandise is merely a routine of their day. Just as making social calls, taking tea, and attending fashionable amusements are all activities of the eighteenth-century woman, shopping appears as a recent addition to aspects of feminine behavior in the way women spend their newly acquired leisure time (See Figure 9).

Shopping as a feature of female activity seems evident in Evelina’s first shopping experience. While the first features to capture Evelina’s attention are the specialty shops and their expansive array of goods, Evelina also depicts the female customers as being smartly dressed, so much so that she imagines they should be making visits instead of shopping. Since visiting was an important factor in an eighteenth-century woman’s life, the suggested association between dressing for visiting and dressing for shopping portrays shopping as a facet of feminine behavior. This picture also implies that eighteenth-century shopping was understood as an important element in the London woman’s routine, and suggests that women used shopping as another opportunity to show off their attire that they had already purchased to gain visual social clout.

Moreover, it is also important to note that Evelina does not clarify whether or not these ladies are upper class or middling class women. Her neglect in explaining which classes are shopping here perhaps could be explained by her inexperience, but more than likely suggests that her inability to distinguish
between women of upper or middling classes could be explained by the fact they are dressed in the same styles and fabrics and are shopping at the same shops. As a result of wearing similar attire and shopping in the same locations, class distinctions become blurred, and fashionable ladies, such as these, form a social network in which one establishes a position according to displaying the latest fashions. Even rustic Evelina temporarily becomes part of this group as they are ushered from shop to shop. Never witnessing such an event as this, Evelina remarks on the pleasure she experiences as they proceed from shop to shop all in the name of selecting a silk, cap, and trimmings. More importantly, as Evelina shops and looks at fashionable goods, she too enjoys becoming part of this social world of fashion.10

*Shopping as Social Gathering*

As shopping transformed into a leisure time activity, the competitive drive of fashion also facilitated a move from a business atmosphere into a form of entertainment. But these changes were met with fierce opposition and attacked by writers such as Defoe. One such offense, as Defoe sees it, is the superfluous displays and the shops designed to attract and to amuse customers. Defoe condemned these transformations as unnecessarily expensive and denounced spending large sums of money in decorating to attract customers. Defoe, in his usual grumbling manner, decries the changes that he witnesses occurring in shops:

Let any man who remembers the glorious state of our Trade about 30 or 40 years past, view but the streets of this opulent city...Here
in the room of a trifling Banker or Goldsmith, we are supplied with a most eminent Brandy Shop (Cheapside!). There, in the room of ditto, you have a flaming shop for White Teapots (Cornhill!). It is impossible that Tea, Coffee and Chocolate can be so enhanced in their consumption without an eminent increase in those trades that attend them, whence we see the most noble shops in the City taken up with the valuable Utensils of the Teatable... The eminent Corner Houses of the chief streets in London are chosen out by the town tinkers to furnish us with Teakettles and Chocolate Pots (vide Catherine Street and Bedford Buildings!). Two thousand pounds is reckoned a small stock in copper pots and laquered kettles, and the new fitting-up one of the brazen people’s shops with fine Sashes etc. to set forth his Ware costs about 500 l. Sterling, which is more by half than the best Draper’s or Mercer’s shop in London requires... It will hardly be believed in ages to come that a pastry cook’s shop, which twenty pounds would effectively furnish at one time with all needful things for sale, yet that fitting up one of these shops should cost upwards of 300 l. Anno Domini 1710, let the year be recorded! (The Review)

He laments the plain, functional shop that has been transformed into a mirrored, gilded, modish resort. He rails against spectacular display and sees no use for these over-the-top retail shops with extravagant trappings. For Defoe, this foolish
transformation corrupts good business practices and turns shops into extravagant playhouses.

But for Burney, the conversion of shops into places of social amusement transforms shops into places not only of social interaction, but also of competitive visual delight. In Burney’s play, The Witlings, the first scene opens in a milliner’s shop with the counter spread with Caps, Ribbons, Fans, and Band Boxes. Mrs. Voluble, an avid customer, explains why she shops everyday: “[T]here are so many pretty things to look at in your shop, that one does not know which way to turn oneself. I declare it’s the greatest treat in the World to me to spend an Hour or two here in a morning; one sees so many fine things, and so many fine folks—Lord, who are all these sweet things for?” (49). Mrs. Voluble not only finds amusement in looking over the fashionable merchandise, but she apparently enjoys company and the refreshments that Mrs. Wheedle serves her customers. Because of the increasing competitive drive of shopping, as owners such as Gabriella and Mrs. Wheedle experience, fashionable shops started providing tables of refreshments for their potential clients to enjoy as they looked, or in some cases, rummaged about. As we see in a shopping scene in Camilla, in Tunbridge Wells Mr. Dennel reads the Daily Advertise, Sir Theophilus reads a pamphlet, Miss Dennel looks about with people walking on the Pantiles, and Sir Sedley Clarendel “[louges] upon a chair in the middle of the shop…eating bon bons” (401). Adding reading material, areas to lounge, and tables of refreshments helped to usher in shopping as a form of social gathering and as a form of amusement to attract customers.
Josiah Wedgwood, an eighteenth-century entrepreneur specializing in pottery, really capitalized on these additions that were meant to entice customers and decided he must have an “Elegant, Extensive and Convenient showroom” in which he created a “fashionable resort” for lavish display (200). In his showroom, elaborate decorations and tables set in exclusive and expensive full dinnerware produced a notable visual delight for his customers (See Figure 10).

Figure 10. Wedgworth’s showroom.

Wedgworth claimed that this transformation “will be in our interest to amuse and divert & please & astonish, nay, even to ravish the Ladies” (201). Here I think that it is imperative to point out that Wedgworth’s new sales techniques of amusing, diverting, pleasing, and astonishing his customers, even to the point of ravishing them, specifically targets female consumers. As Wedgworth proposes,
his showroom of eye-catching delights will entice female shoppers to buy what is visually desirable, and not necessarily needed. It seems that an elegant display of fashionable goods creates a desire for these goods in a female individual that perhaps previously did not exist.

As Andrea Henderson’s “Burney’s *The Wanderer* and Early-Nineteenth-Century Commodity Fetishism” notes, “The new shops reflected not just a new competitiveness but also a belief… that showiness and spectacle were the surest ways to make [consumerism] grow” (7). Creating a spectacle of fashionable articles became the most assured way to attract and maintain buying customers. Alongside this new competitiveness that encourages shops and shopkeepers to showcase their goods, consumers begin to desire fashionable goods for their social significance. As customers from across all classes converge in this social space, not only do shops serve as a means of entertainment, but they also become a place for negotiating social relations. As Burney represents it, shops provide an inclusive space that contains individuals from across the ranks of society. But it is through the shops’ diversions and displays of fashionable objects that shops compete against each other for potential clients.

*Competitive Shopping for Admiration*

Just as shops compete for consumers, the competitive spirit is also manifested in fashionable society, sparking a rivalry for admiration between mini-circles and individuals within the larger circle of high life. In *Camilla*, Mrs. Arlbery possesses a reputation for being a woman of fashion and delights herself on having the capacity to capture everyone’s attention at social events. Miss
Margland is now a governess, but she was formerly a lady of fashion. She lost her social standing when her father lost his wealth through “gaming and extravagance” (45). Miss Margland encounters Mrs. Arlbery for the first time at a public ball at Northwick’s Assembly Room. Until she arrives, Mrs. Margland and her protégé, Indiana, are basking in the adulation of male admirers. But once Mrs. Arlbery enters the room, she emanates “a look that announces a decided superiority to all she saw,” and “she was immediately joined by all the officers and several other gentlemen, whose eagerness to shew themselves of her acquaintance marked her for a woman of some consequence” (73). The next morning she arrives at public breakfast dressed more “fantastic and studied than the night before…her power was absolute… she could not have failed to strike with admiration even the most hackneyed seekers of character…who with open eyes and ears, regarded her a phenomenon” (86-89). The attention and adoration Mrs. Arlbery receives arises from her striking appearance. In her case, it appears that displaying her financial resources through her selection of fashionable merchandise serves as a means to attain social status and power.

As Mrs. Arlbery socializes with her usual group of fashionable acquaintances, there seems to be a struggle for attention going on between her circle and another group. As they sashay around the room displaying their fashionable attire, Mrs. Arlbery grumbles about her competition. From her observations and complaints, it seems she is up against tough opponents here. “These tonnish people…lead the world; and if one has not a few of them in one’s
train, ‘twere as well turn hermit” (399). She goes on to explain how the competition works among the fashionable world:

Those good people strive to make us believe we are nothing to them. They strive even to believe it themselves… They come hither to recruit their exhausted powers, not, indeed, by joining our society, but by a view of new objects for their senses, and the flattering idea, for their minds, of the envy or admiration they excite. (439)

Mrs. Arlbery’s attempt to justify her annoyance and her aversion to the present competition, ironically, exposes her own intentions. Not only does she adorn herself in fashionable apparel to attract attention, but she also attempts to belittle others who tread on her territory while thriving on the admiration of others. And like these rivals, she utilizes whatever tactic or fashionable articles that are necessary to be successful.

Similarly, Indiana finds great satisfaction in attracting attention and receiving admiration in these public settings from her stylish appearance. Like Mrs. Arlbery, she attends the public breakfast and is “enchanted to again display herself where sure of again being admired” (83). We even learn that the adulation she receives raises “her beauty higher than ever in her own estimation” (150). Indiana hopes that her appearance will make a lasting impression on Southampton, and it will become “the resort of all of fashion in the nation” (747). And when she finally visits London, her only concern is dressing and displaying herself (812). While Indiana is a new presence in the fashionable circles of Mrs.
Arlbery, Mrs. Berlinton, a constant rival, arrives in town and makes the contest even more challenging. Mrs. Berlinton’s aim is “to be universally alluring; and she looked from object to object, in smiling discourse, till one by one, every object could look only at her” (810). She attracts such attention that soon she is surrounded by gazing admirers and encircled by avowed adorers. She describes her victorious venture as a conquest made through the means of art.

Here instead of Burney’s women concerning themselves with affairs of a domestic atmosphere, we can see women specifically seeking attention and admiration as they fashion themselves into objects of desire. Instead of her female characters sitting in parlor rooms embroidering, sewing, playing musical instruments, or singing—the accomplishments of the socially constructed lady of conduct books—Burney’s women are shopping, learning the art of selecting and the importance of visibility. Through making decisions about fashion accessories, displaying their fine selections, they win the attention and affection of the most preferred men. Just as objects that attract attention and gain admiration become invested with power, as Jonathan Crary notes, Burney’s women gain a sense of empowerment through their fashionable apparel. In this changing shopping environment, Burney’s women embody the traits of the emerging dimensions of a rising consumer culture. Participating in the recent methods of “just looking,” they learn how to become consumers in the new shopping arena. But more importantly, these looking methods highlight the scopophilic nature that is embedded in shopping. Through their acculturation into this new environment of display, desire, accumulation, and competition, the competitive nature of the
marketplace becomes manifested in women of the *beau monde* as they competitively contend for admiration.

Whether it is Evelina learning to shop around and to “*Londonize*” herself; or Cecilia discovering that the value of a fashionable object is not reflected in its price; or Camilla promenading along the shops in Pantiles in Tunbridge Wells or shopping in Southampton and experiencing the seduction of designer goods; or Juliet working for a milliner or setting up shop in Brighton and displaying goods for potential consumers; the induction of Burney’s women into social circles stems from their encounter with or preoccupation with fashionable goods. These experiences suggest that the multidimensional aspects of shopping not only create a social space for women across all classes, but also create a social network of shared social experiences with a common social dialogue about what fashionable goods communicate. For Burney’s young heroines’ introduction into the Georgian world of fashion, one thing is certain: the lady of fashion is not born; she is in fact created.

Notes

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1 Argand lamps were a new type of home oil lamps that hit the market in the late eighteenth century. The special construction produced the equivalent of about six to ten wax candles, but more importantly, it was cost efficient. It soon displaced other oil lamps, and its popularity caused an increase in the manufacture in a variety of decorative forms. Even though costly at first, these lamps spread through all classes.

2 See *Sophie in London, 1786, being the diary of Sophie v. la Roche* trans. Clare Williams (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933).

3 As Timothy Dyskstal’s “*Evelina* and the Culture Industry” *Criticism* 37.4 (Fall, 1995): 559-582, so aptly points out, “In *Evelina*…culture has become a spectacle, a place to see and be seen” (559). Dyskstal looks at the relationship between art venues, such as plays, concerts, and pleasure gardens that Evelina enjoys, and moral instruction, enlightenment, and pleasure, and argues that Burney gives us a satirical view of art that is consumed for pleasure.


7 On an interesting note, Davis claims that the first instance of “fast food” was started when women would hand breakfast out their windows and doors to the laboring class workers on their way to their jobs.

8 According to Warwick Wroth’s *The London Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1896) the early years charged three pence for drinking the water, but by the late 1770s the charge had increased to sixpence or a guinea subscription. And the mixed social groups and the dishabille inspired George Bickham to write the song, “The Charms of Dishabille” (15-24).

9 During my visit to Tunbridge Wells in the summer of 2008, I had the great fortune to visit the Tunbridge Museum and interview the curator. The museum houses some really interesting pieces: a doll house, a house-like box with window that display a wealthy lady’s lap dog sitting on luxurious pillows. During this visit, I learned that Tunbridge ware was one of the earliest designer goods.

CHAPTER III
DRESSING FOR APPEARANCE: LOOKING LIKE A LADY OF FASHION

And now, unveiled, the toilet stands displayed,
Each silver case in mystic order laid.
First, robed in white, the nymph intent adores
With head uncovered, the cosmetic pow’rs.
A heav’nly image in the glass appears,
To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears;
Th’ inferior priestess, at her altar’s side,
Trembling, begins the sacred rites of pride.
Unnumbered treasures ope at once, and here
The various off’rings of the world appear;
From each she nicely culls with curious toil,
And decks the goddess with the glitt’ring spoil.
This casket India’s glowing gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.
The tortoise here and elephant unite,
Transformed to combs, the speckled and the white.
Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles, billet-doux
Now awful beauty puts on all its arms
The fair each moment rises in her charms,
Repairs her smiles, awakens ev’re grace,
And call forth all the wonder of her face;
See by degrees a purer blush arise,
And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes.
The busy Sylphs surround their darling care;
These set the head, and those divide the hair,
Some fold the sleeve, whilst other plait the gown;
And Betty’s praised for labors not her own.

--Alexander Pope, The Rape of the Lock, Canto I.121-148

Alexander Pope’s mock epic surveys the daily trappings of a young, fashionable lady. In Belinda’s world of fashion, she sleeps until noon, dresses with the help of a servant, and plays cards at Hampton Court until the early hours of the morning. In this passage, Pope leads his audience through a step by step instructional guide that shows Belinda dressing to go out for the night. While he seldom gives us a depiction of Belinda, he focuses on detailed descriptions of the
fashionable objects that are placed on her toilette. As she begins her daily ritual, it is the silver cases that contain make-up or “cosmetic pow’rs” and products of empire, such as tortoiseshell and ivory combs, and jewel studded pins, that transform this young woman into a lady of fashion. As she suits up for battle in the competitive world of fashion, she styles her hair and slips into her gown. In doing so, she emerges as a beautifully adorned “goddess,” with her beauty and fashionable appearance acting as her weaponry and power. In light of Pope’s satiric intentions, he exposes how the space of the eighteenth-century dressing room and its fashionable goods contain transforming powers that are instrumental in converting a woman into a lady of fashion.

Dressing rooms captured the imagination of eighteenth-century England and became a central feature of eighteenth-century literature. Tita Chico argues that

in the early part of the century, satiric dressing room scenes design the female subject as an overwhelming figure of sexual excess, theatrical dissembling, and feminine agency, posited in tandem with (or as a provocation for) a text’s mode of containment or censure. Later writers, mostly domestic novelists, envisage the dressing room as both a narrative obstacle and goal, with the successful heroine in her dressing room a model of virtue and intellectual maturity. (10)

She continues her argument by pinpointing that the eighteenth-century domestic novel dressing room was a transitional space that confirms a woman’s virtue in finding a husband and establishing status as a good mother and wife. Chico
concludes that “from the late seventeenth century to the late eighteenth, the lady’s dressing room changed from being a site of lasciviousness and secrecy for aristocratic women to an emblem for good and virtuous mothers” (9). For Burney, however, the dressing room and the dressing of her female characters from across all social stations provide a means for women to fashion themselves, literally with clothing, makeup, and fashionable accessories, for participation in the world of fashion. Certainly, it could be argued that her young heroines are in search of a husband, but these young men can only be found mixing among the fashionable throng. Thus, in order to find a husband, they must learn to fashion themselves in the material trappings of the beau monde.

In fact, dressing in fashionable attire, as Burney represents it, emerges as a central component of eighteenth-century femininity. Julie Park discusses Evelina’s experience at Cox’s Museum and concludes that the mechanical objects she encounters parallel Burney’s heroines and embody the model of femininity perpetuated by eighteenth-century conduct books. She claims

The mechanical pineapple that opens and “closes again of itself” serves as a model of the ideal femininity—open, yet controlled—that conduct books of the period so rigorously formulated, and that Burney, in her obsession with providing “examples,” “models,” and “illustrations” of conduct, wants Evelina and her other heroines to embody. (38)

But in her preoccupation with fashion, Burney produces images of femininity that disrupt eighteenth-century didactic constructions by placing her fashionably
dressed women under the spotlight of the *beau monde*. In fact, these female characters become objects to be looked at and admired, just like the objects Evelina encounters at the Cox’s Museum.

By dressing her female characters in fashionable attire, Burney takes what seemingly is a mundane aspect of everyday life and turns it into the most visible manifestation of the material abundance that defines what it means to be an English woman in the eighteenth century. Drawn from all across the social spectrum of eighteenth-century society, Burney’s women learn to dress in fashionable attire. By flaunting the fruits of the nation’s prosperity, Burney’s women exemplify the period’s preoccupation with scopophilia and with reading the signs of appearance. Dress emerges as a language, part of a social system of signs, that speaks in terms of gender and class. The discourses of dress develop across class lines and manifest visually through the influx in styles, fabrics, and the rise of print media.

Dressing in fashionable attire, then, as Burney represents it, becomes a visual manifestation about how individuals perceive their place in society. They blur established notions of class not only with their display of specific styles and fabrics, but also by their participation, sometimes only on the outskirts, in fashionable society. Instead of a vertical emulation in which lower classes mimic the dress of their so-called betters, fashionable dress works across and through class lines creating an interlacing movement of emulation. By dressing in stylish apparel, a woman’s identity and social status becomes displayed on her body. But the creative design of dresses that displayed elaborate portions of fabric, the richly
embroidered V-shaped stomachers, the bust-enhancing stays, the hip-altering hoops, bustles, and panniers all literally transform the physical shape of a woman’s body. In examining the fashionable world of Burney, we learn how the influx of new styles, fabrics, and fashionable accessories interact with and reshape concepts of class and eighteenth-century femininity. Burney’s preoccupation with particular fabrics reminds us of the important and powerful role clothing and accessories play in defining a sense of self and one’s place in society, but it also suggest the ambiguity of dress in which fashionable attire can either invent or express a person’s identity or aspirations through appearances. Dress’s contradictory status as both a means of expression and invention makes clothing a powerful diagnostic tool with which to explore the shifting notions of class and femininity.

Alongside the competitiveness of fashion that is disseminated through shop windows, showrooms, fashion dolls, and fashion magazines that pressure women “to be seen in fashion,” women find social power in appearing in the latest styles. Whereas Parks contends that through their surplus of fashionable consumption “Burney’s heroines tend to denigrate into grotesque spectacles that transgress boundaries of propriety, despite their good intentions” (42), I will demonstrate that by dressing her women in fashionable attire, Burney shows how the allure of fashionable spectacles endows her women with power over their admirers. The mesmerizing effect that these women have on those who view them exposes the vulnerability of their male admirers and emphasizes the power that beautiful, fashionable women possess. Despite the objectification that becomes woven into the fabric of the eighteenth-century beau monde, and in spite of the anxiety that
women experience to be in fashion, Burney’s works show us how a fashionably constructed women can supplant the power of the male admirers. Such means as dressing actually empowers women. Instead of turning them into “grotesque spectacles,” as Park contends, fashionable apparel offers women an opportunity to act as subversive agents within the social realm.

*Getting Dressed-up*

![Lady dressing in dressing room](image)

When Burney opens the door of her dressing rooms, interestingly, it is the women who do not already belong to fashionable circles that Burney allows us to see dressing. Regardless of her female characters’ classes assigned through birth, learning to dress in fashionable apparel permits their inclusion into social circles. Upon Evelina’s arrival in London, the first order of business that Mrs. Mirvan deems the most important is Evelina’s dress. It is not the rules of decorum in the
ballroom, not how to drink tea properly, nor any other social skills that Mrs. Mirvan takes the time to show Evelina. This lady of fashion knows that Evelina’s rustic, country attire will never permit her into her social circles until she looks like a fashionable lady. After Mrs. Mirvan helps her select and purchase appropriate clothing, Evelina begins the process of adorning herself for entrance into the world. Like Pope’s Belinda, Evelina “sleeps with the sun, and wakes with the moon,” and begins her daily ritual of dressing (39). As she prepares for a night out, the Branghton sisters abruptly intrude into her dressing room and discover her dressing in front of the mirror. Seeming rather surprised that they have “caught her at the glass,” they cannot wait to tell their brother that Evelina, too, dresses in front of a mirror. Their behavior is somewhat puzzling until Burney reveals in a later episode how their brother chides them for spending so much time in front of their mirror dressing. The Branghton sisters do not have a dressing room like Mrs. Mirvan provides for Evelina; as an alternative, they have a make-shift dressing area in their living quarters above their father’s silversmith shop.

When social custom obliges Evelina to make a return visit to them, the Branghton sisters become distraught when she arrives before they are completely dressed. As their father opens the door to the improvised room, they express surprise of Evelina’s arrival time, as they thought “miss was used to nothing but quality hours” (173). In other words, they expected her to arrive later in the day, which would give them plenty of time for dressing. They ask her to return downstairs and wait in the shop until they have finished dressing. To this appeal their brother replies, “Then what business have you to be such a while getting on
your cloaths? You’re never ready…” (174). On a certain level, their brother’s observation is indeed true. They are never quite ready because they are never completely properly dressed. Despite their attempts at dressing, their ignorance about fashion prevents them from being introduced into fashionable circles. However, by attending leisured amusements, such as the opera and pleasure resorts, and by attempting to adopt fashionable attire, they do manage to participate on the periphery of fashionable society. Neither Evelina nor the Branghton sisters possesses the social lineage to be included in the fashion circles of London. However, Evelina’s inclusion stems from Mrs. Mirvan’s fashion guidance on dressing in the proper attire. In other words, regardless of her background, Evelina manages to look like a lady, so if she looks the part, she can fit in.

Figure 12. Fashionably dressed ladies of the *beau monde*.

Like Evelina, Camilla learns to outfit herself in the proper fashionable apparel. As Deidra Shawn Lynch argues, Camilla “purchases clothes, she visits
public places, because in the world one conforms to the social and socializing demand that an individual display her identity. Camilla adapts to the codes of recognition requiring some one who wishes to count as a lady to look like a lady, and in that sense, to make a scene” (176). To be accepted in the circles of high life means to look like the fashionable ladies who form them (Figure 12). Camilla receives an invitation for a great ball and supper that requires a particular type of attire: “a clear fine lawn, with lilac plumes and ornaments” (690). To be of her usual service to Camilla, Mrs. Mittin scurries from shop to shop and purchases thirty yards of muslin, “enough for three whole dresses,” and of course, the “useful” Mrs. Mittin hopes that she will get not only a dress for herself with the extra fabric, but a handkerchief and an apron as well. Despite that she has been scammed and sold defective cloth, Mrs. Mittin designs an ostentatious gown for Camilla that is as “superfluous as it was expensive” (710). In her dressing room, Camilla reviews her reflection in the mirror and contemplates how her appearance does in fact “make a scene”:

Her robe was everywhere edged with the finest Valencienne lace; her lilac shoes, sash, and gloves, were richly spangled with silver, and finished with a silver fringe; her ear-rings and necklace were of lilac and gold beads; her fan and shoe roses were brilliant with lilac foil, and her bouquet of artificial lilac flower, and her plumes of lilac feathers, were here and there tipt with the most tiny transparent white beads, to give the effect of being glittering with the dew. (721)
The reflection in the mirror Camilla sees is the perfect picture of a finely dressed lady (Figure 13). Clothed in the finest fashionable attire, even to the point that the fashionable Mrs. Berlinton feels envious, Camilla, the daughter of a country parson, attends an exclusive, invitation-only event, an event so restricted that a specific uniform is required. Because of her expensive, but flawed muslin gown, with all the additional trimmings and accessories, she passes for someone of high social standing. Burney’s preoccupation with particular fabrics and detailed descriptions of Camilla’s fashion accessories underscores the important and powerful role clothing and accessories play in defining a sense of self and one’s place in society. But this country parson’s daughter’s ability to participate in
fashionable circles also suggests the ambiguity of dressing: clothing can either invent or express a person’s identity or aspirations through personal appearances.

Changing Trends in Fabrics and Styles

To more fully understand the significance of Burney’s focus on fashionable attire for her women, it is important to explore the historical aspects of fabrics, styles, and accessories, such as the ones that Camilla displays. We will see how changes in the availability of fabric and simpler styles permitted ways for social emulation to occur that blurred class distinctions. These changing styles and fabrics crisscrossed class lines and created an arena for horizontal emulation. One of the factors that was instrumental in anchoring fashion as such an influential force was the expensive, imported goods from abroad, especially France and the East. As dress historian Anne Buck explains, the richer and most expensive silks of the early eighteenth century were imported or smuggled into England. Wars and frictions instigated embargos against imported goods and heavy duties ignited big business in banned and smuggled materials, making items, such as silk, hard to come by and expensive. But with the arrival of the Huguenot refugees from France, the silk industry began to flourish in England. As Aileen Ribeiro’s *Fashion and Fiction* points out,

The biggest industry in London was the manufacture and finishing of textiles and their conversion into furnishing and clothes. At the apex of the hierarchy of fabrics was silks; the industry, dating from the 1660s, was based in the East End of London, notably Spitalfields, which produced a wide range of high quality figured
silks. Cheaper, plain silks were affordable by the middle classes, and even lower-class women for best wear. (297)

Here Ribeiro explains how the increase in the availability of silk, as well as a significant decline in the cost, gave individuals from across the social spectrum an opportunity to purchase formerly exclusive upper class fabrics. The availability of cheaper silk acts as a leveling device for social classes in mid-eighteenth century England. To keep pace with changing fashion styles, and because silk was time-consuming and expensive to maintain, other fabrics, such as chintz and linens, began to compete with silk as the fabric of demand.

In the later years of the eighteenth century, the development of new fabrics, new technologies, new industries, and new styles provides even more access for individuals from any class to dress in fashionable ways.³ Muslin, which is a closely woven unbleached or white cotton, especially began to challenge the supremacy of silk. As Anne Buck points out, “by the 1780s the changing character of dress brought another fabric into use which was to lessen still further the demand for silks” (194). Previously only used for accessories, such as handkerchiefs or men’s neckwear, muslin or lawn, such as Camilla wears, becomes the preferred fabric for women’s dresses. Buck goes on to explain: “The technical achievements in cotton spinning had made it possible to produce fine thread at a much cheaper rate and thin light gauzes were now woven in fine cotton rather than linen thread” (194). Industries in Scotland at Paisley, Manchester, Canterbury, and Norwich all turned their attention to producing muslins. While plain muslin was relatively inexpensive, fine embroidery in gold or silver thread and other
decorations, such as embellish Camilla’s dress, added to the cost of the gown. Also, this light-weight, sometimes almost transparent, fabric helped to prompt the design of new styles. Selecting and purchasing the correct fabric was not the only factor that helped women to circulate in high social circles. The rise of more simplistic and informal styles, as dress historian Beverly Lemire addresses, also made it easier to replicate in less expensive alternative types of cotton. With the changing demand of fabrics, new styles also indicated one’s adeptness to fashion.

Beginning in the early part and extending into the last third of the century, styles emerge that seem to correlate with the increasing diversity of fabric, but these new styles also ushered in business opportunities for women. As in most rising professions, men dominated the market on making clothes, restricting women to only making undergarments. Men exploited women’s needlepoint and embroidery skills for the detailed work on undergarments. By restricting women to these types of garments that were concealed from view, men safeguarded their positions and incomes. If a woman could not be associated with her work, then she would not become a popular and well-known seamstress. With changing fashions and the influx of new styles, women seized the opportunity to set themselves up in trade, such as we see with Burney’s women who own their own millinery, haberdashery, and mantua businesses.

Avril Hart points out the significance of the mantua with respect to women’s fashions:

The evolution of the woman’s mantua is associated with a significant change in fashionable dress in the last quarter of the
seventeenth century. As a fashion, it coincided with the long awaited emancipation of seamstresses who were finally allowed to acquire professional status as dressmakers....it was the first item of dress made by women for women. (91)

Figure 14. Mantua styled dress.

This new style replaced constrictive corsets with pleated fabric that was shaped to fit the body (Figure 14). Without the need for male constructed boned bodices, women could sew their own garments. The mantua not only freed women from wearing confining garments, but it gave them opportunities to set up their own businesses in a male dominated profession. Juliet witnesses how women gain independence from her experience in Mrs. Hart’s mantua shop. Mrs. Hart
encourages Juliet to become her apprentice so that she too can open her own shop one day.

The design of this particular style not only provided a means for income for women, but it also permitted women to display their wealth. The long train of fabric in the back could be left hanging long, thus displaying enormous amounts of fabric or it could be draped upward on the center of the back, which created a bustle look (Figure 15). Most of these open or closed gowns fastened over an elaborate embroidered stomacher and often a fashionable petticoat of lace could be seen underneath. As the style slowly changed, the upper bodice remained essentially the same, while the skirt became wider and called for a hoop underneath.

Figure 15. Lady wearing dress with bustle.
By the mid-1700s, the *robe à la française*, sack back or sack gown, began replacing the mantua and reshaped a woman’s physical appearance. The unfitted back was characterized by gathers or pleats at the shoulder that permitted the fabric to flow and flare out towards the ground (Figure 16). Enormous amounts of fabric were needed to produce the desired effect of displaying a woman’s wealth. The fitted bodice in the front of the gown was attached to each side of the V-shape stomacher, leaving a richly decorated stomacher exposed to view, and the bottom front of the gown was usually open, making an inverted V shaped that exposed a petticoat, possibly of expensive lace (Figure 17). Underneath the stomacher, stays were used to pull the shoulders back, with the shoulder blades sometimes touching, to produce a very erect posture. Stays looked like a short-waisted jacket with
shoulder straps, which opened down the back and were fastened tightly. Small stitched pleated vertical pockets on the front contained whale bones that constricted the torso, which produced a conical shape that gave a woman the appearance of a high, full bosom. The stomacher, along with the inverted V-shaped opening on the dress, helped to create the desired womanly. This type of dress was initially worn over a circular hoop, but as the years progressed, the hoop became replaced with panniers. Unlike the dome-shaped hoop, panniers kept the front and back of the skirt flat and extended the skirts sideways; some even reached as much as fifteen feet across (Figure 18). This style gave women the opportunity to display expensive patterned fabrics from both the front and back view. But this style definitely created problems for women walking through doorways, sitting, and riding in carriages (Figure 19). When panniers finally reached their peak, smaller bustle pads or bum pads became popular for a short time.

![Figure 17. Elaborate decorations on V-shaped stomacher.](image)
Figure 18. Dress with panniers.

Figure 19. Lady wearing panniers turning sideways to pass through doorway.
By the 1770s, the sack gown begins to lose its popularity, and by the 1780s, hoops also begin to vanish. While the abundant heights of hairstyling and the elaborate ornamentation exist for a short time, with the onset of the French Revolution and the rejection of formal dress, English dress turns to country styles for their patterns. Accordingly, this turn to adopt the design of country attire is another way in which fashion moves horizontally across classes to create popular styles. As a less formal dress becomes popular, dresses return to a fitted bodice without constrictive stays, and softer skirts are looped up in loose puffs of material. The à la polonaise seems to be an imitation of a simplistic country dress, the one we usually associate with Little Bo Peep (Figure 20). By the end of the eighteenth century, white fabric, especially muslin, is used to create even more unsophisticated styles. Simple gowns of thin white muslin with a raised “empire” waistline accentuated by a colored sash, made popular by Marie Antoinette, became popular, but more elaborate and expensive trimming became fashionable. The stylish flourish of expensive accessories, the creative design of dresses that displayed elaborate portions of fabric, richly embroidered V-shaped stomachers, bust-enhancing and posture-correcting stays, hip-altering hoops, bustles, and panniers, all show how fashion literally transforms the physical shape of a woman’s body. In that respect, the visual presentation of the fashionable woman helps to shape perceptions about femininity in how an eighteenth-century woman should ideally appear.
Besides the different fabrics and changing styles of gowns, fashion accessories became increasingly important dimensions of a woman’s fashionable attire. One such article that both Camilla and Evelina bring into play is the eighteenth-century fan (Figure 21). Brought into vogue in England by Queen Elizabeth I, fans spread throughout high society and placed fashion in the palm of a woman’s hand. The eighteenth century became a distinguishing era for fans as they developed into the ultimate feminine status symbol. In addition to being used as an implement of flirtation and disguise, they publically displayed a woman’s
social status. The most common fan was a folding fan. What might seem as such a small, insignificant item soon became a vital accessory. Exquisite carvings embellished handles made from ivory, tortoiseshell and mother-of-pearl. Some were even wrought with gold and silver and encrusted with precious stones, such as emeralds and diamonds. As well, highly decorated vellum, parchment, or fine silks depicted scenes that rivaled fine paintings. Often the fan displayed two different images, one for the owner and another for the spectator. One of London’s popular periodicals, The Grand Magazine, best explains this multipurpose accessory:

> It exercises the office of the zephyrs, and cools the glowing breast. It saves the blush of modesty by showing all we wish to see, yet hiding all that we desire to conceal. It serves the purpose of a mask, covering the face that would remain unknown. It keeps off the rude beams of the uncourtly sun...or from the fiercest ravage saves the brilliant eye and blooming check. It hides bad teeth, malicious smiles and frowns of discontent; stands as a screen before the secret whisper of malicious scandal; expresses the caprices of the heart, nay sometime even speaks; in a word, it has a thousand admirable qualities, and may justly be entitled one of the noblest inventions of the human mind.

The eighteenth-century fan also gains popularity because of the encoded messages that could be communicated with a slight hand gesture. Fan designers, such as Duvelleroy on Regent Street, helped to popularize these covert signals: carrying
the fan in the right hand in front of the face meant “follow me,” while twirling in the left hand said “we are watched.” Such encrypted messages increased the fan’s popularity and extended its use as an indispensable part of a lady’s wardrobe. Despite its obvious practical purpose of cooling a lady’s face, the fan was treasured for what it represented in the world of fashion. Whereas Camilla carries her fan merely to compliment her fine muslin gown, Evelina uses hers to disguise her face in an embarrassing exchange with Lord Orville.

Figure 21. Eighteenth-century fashionable fans.

Fashionable gowns and decorative accents were not the only devices employed in assembling a lady of fashion. As Pope emphasizes in Belinda’s obsession with her hair, a lady’s hair was a key component of her identity. Another
interesting feature of Evelina’s metamorphosis that helps her to gain access to fashionable society is her transformation at the hairdressing shop. But before looking at Evelina’s experience of having her hair dressed, it might be useful to say a few words about the significance of hair and changing hair styles. From the later Stuart period when bigwig was coined to introduce a person of special importance, big hair captures attention. The *Oxford English Dictionary’s* first definition of “bigwig,” in 1703, is “a person of high official standing; a noteworthy or important person” (“bigwig,” def. 1). As Margaret Ketchum Powell and Joseph R. Roach argue in “Big Hair,” “More intimate than clothing and yet more reliably prearranged than countenance, hair represents a primary means of staking a claim to a social space on the occasion of first impressions. And the bigger the hair…the bigger the claim” (83). Previously, big hair and wigs were used to denote a man’s status and were an important part of a man’s appearance, and women’s fashionable head-dress focused little on her hair and consisted of a small cap with long lappets. But the changing fashions of the 1770s ushered in new styles that placed great importance on the visual presentation of a woman’s hairstyle as well as the skill of a hairdresser.

Following the example of Mrs. Mirvan, Evelina visits the hairdresser to have her hair dressed. As she describes her experience, she complains how strangely her hair feels “full of powder and black pins, and a great cushion on the top of it” (27). Her hair is so tangled and teased that she does not know how or when she will be able to comb it. James Stewart’s 1782 *Plocacosmos; or the Whole Art of Hair Dressing* explains the technique of using the “cushion” as the
foundation of these new elaborate hair styles. A cushioned pad, a heart shaped type of pillow, stuffed with wool or horsehair was placed on the center of the crown of the head for the foundation for the hairstyle to be built upon. The stylist then “frizled” or teased and twisted crisp curls of hair around and over the pad to hide it (Figures 22,23). This technique helped to provide the height needed for these elaborate works of art, which often incorporated exotic and unusual ornaments, such as plumes, fruit, birdcages, ships, and flowers. Because these pads seem to cause headaches, they were later replaced with wire cages. Yet Evelina goes on to explain how this particular process helps to convert her rustic appearance into an unrecognizable presence, making it possible to socialize with Mrs. Mirvan’s acquaintances: “I believe you would hardly know me, for my face looks quite different to what it did before my hair was dressed” (27).
Despite Evelina’s lack of material wealth or social position, her altered appearance with an eye-catching dress, complete with all the trimmings and an elaborate hairstyle, allows her to circulate in fashionable circles. In fact, it is at Mrs. Stanley’s private ball that she captures Lord Orville’s attention. She is so much transformed that Lord Orville, a distinguished nobleman, mistakenly assumes she is someone of consequence and selects her for his dance partner. After the ball, she writes to Villars “For had I been the person of the most consequence in the room, I could not have met with more attention and respect” (32). Despite her countrified upbringing and seclusion from London’s social circles, she can mingle with London society as long as she wears the proper attire and has the right look. In sporting her new “dressed” hair and newly acquired dress made from expensive fabric in the latest style, Evelina looks like a lady of wealth and fashion.

Figure 23. Examples of eighteenth-century hairstyles.
Of course, ladies sporting these outrageous endeavors encountered many difficulties. These elaborate hairstyles achieved such heights that ladies were obliged to kneel in their carriages, even placing their heads out of the window. Not surprisingly, satirical prints emerged showing women sitting on the floor of their carriages and hairdressers standing on a ladder to add the finishing touches to their hairstyles (Figure 24). With ladies often keeping hairstyles for weeks at a time—sometimes even months—perhaps one of the most serious problems women dealt with was pests and vermin that would inhabit these creations. But if a woman wanted to present herself as a member in the fashionable world, she felt obliged to participate.

As Grant McCracken’s *Big Hair: A Journey into the Transformation of Self* sees it, the time and effort of the hairdresser plus the leisure time that it takes for the recipient to get and wear the style reveals the wealth and indulgence of the spender. He goes on to suggest that hairdressing offers a prime example of conspicuous consumption that only the wealthy could afford. In other words, if a woman could afford the two to four hours of leisure often needed to construct these hairstyles, plus if she could pay for the services and the elaborate decorations, this gave a public visual appearance of a woman’s wealth. But as we see in Evelina, displaying an elaborate hairstyle is not necessarily an accurate account of a woman’s financial means. What is apparent, however, is how the appearance of wealth embodied in fashion accessories all help to transform a young woman into a lady of fashion. More importantly, Evelina’s experience shows us the power embedded in a fashionable appearance.
Visual Dissemination of Fashion: Dolls and Magazines

Fashion became a powerful force in part as a result of its wide dissemination. Many agents were responsible for spreading the changing whims of fashion. Enticing displays of fashionable objects in shop windows and the *ton* flaunting the latest styles were certainly important to the distribution of fashion. Perhaps the most influential were the introduction of the fashion doll and the rise of print media. What made these means so instrumental was their visual appeal and accessibility. Regardless of whether an individual was literate or not, the visual presentations of each made them available across class lines.
In the early eighteenth century, the French fashion doll arrived on England’s shore. The French doll was a miniature replica of a fashionable lady that displayed every aspect of fashion. From designs in hairstyles to extravagant silk gowns with Venetian lace down to delicate shoes, the dolls advertised fashions that ladies could order. So it is not by accident that in *Evelina* Captain Mirvan complains that Mrs. Mirvan and her acquaintances remind him of French dolls. But the French fashion dolls were expensive and not available to the vast majority of women. According to Neil McKendrick, “Where the French fashion doll of the first decades of the century served only an *élite*, the English fashion doll of the last decades of the century served a mass consumer market” (43). The English fashion doll, instead, was an inexpensive flat piece of cardboard that came supplied with an abundance of interchangeable dresses, shoes, undergarments, hairstyles, jewelry, hats, furs, and more:

Six complete sets of tastefully coloured, cut-out dresses and coiffures…complete dresses and négligés, caracos, chemises, furs, hats, bonnets, poufs, etc. Each dress and hat is made in such a way that the doll can easily be dressed in it, giving a fully dressed or décolleté effect while the dress fits perfectly in either case. Hats or bonnets can be put straight or at an angle, suiting the hairstyle in a tasteful manner or otherwise…This dressing and undressing…makes for the uniqueness of the English doll. (McKendrick 107)

This precursor to the paper-doll worked wonders in the fashion market. With thousands of these cheap, inexpensive dolls circulating, they reached multiple
social levels. This little doll literally put fashion into the hands of people across class lines. What fashions people of lesser financial means could not afford to buy, they could copy either with second-hand clothing or with cheaper materials, as does Mrs. Mittin.

Without a doubt, the rising print media facilitated an acceleration in the tempo of change. Newspapers and fashion magazines dispersed fashion news with detailed depictions throughout a diverse population, geographically as well through the means of the travelling stage coaches. As McKendrick points out, “for although the first fashion magazine appeared in France in the 1670s, and even fashion drawings have been found as early as 1677, in Le Mercure Galant, it was in England that the systematic and … widespread production of fashion prints began” (47). An avalanche of ladies’ magazines, such as The Ladies’ Companion of Complete Pocket Book, The Ladies’ New Elegant Pocket Book., The Ladies’ Pocket Journal or Toilet Assistant, The London Fashionable and Polite Repository, and The Polite and Fashionable Ladies’ Companion, began to replace previous periodicals, such as The Tatler and The Spectator. Advertisements from entrepreneurs, tradesmen, hat-makers, dress-makers, and other entrepreneurs filled the pages with detailed descriptions and pictures of services and goods.
To make their products appealing to women, these advertisements presented illustrations of women wearing different styles, fabrics, accessories, and hairstyles. With its first publication of the fashion print, The Lady’s Magazine surpassed other ladies’ magazines and prompted changes not only in the way fashion was propagated, but also in the way to create desire. Fashion plates were copper-engraved, sometimes steel-engraved, plates that were hand-colored depictions of gowns and other fashion accessories. These colorful images were designed to be
visually enticing to capture women’s attention and to stimulate desire for the latest styles and material available (Figure 25). This visual illustration was meant to forecast fashion and spread new ideas. Whether through the means of shop windows, fashion dolls, or fashion plates, it is visibility—the ability to see the material goods—that these ways offer that attract the attention of society. Once individuals see the fashions, imagine how the goods will look on them, and speculate how these fashionable goods will affect their social appearance, then fashion becomes a powerful force. These advertisements did not target a particular class. Since literacy was not needed for visual images, anyone who could see and anyone who had the financial means or even access to castoff clothing, could imitate these public images. In this way, fashion creates a means social emulation to occur, and fashion becomes the means through which individuals from across social classes participate in the *beau monde*.

*Making a Fashion Statement*

Clothing then, as Burney represents it, becomes a visual manifestation about how individuals perceive their place in society and attempt to establish it or maintain it through their wearing of fashionable attire. In order to maneuver successfully in the world of fashion, individuals needed to look a particular way. As Lemire’s *Dress, Culture, and Commerce* points out, “For English men and women, the garments they wore reflected deeply held views about their place in society and the ways in which they expected to be perceived” (6). Lemire’s assertion could not be more evident than in Burney’s portrayal of Madame Duval, the former tavern girl who married a French gentleman. Madame Duval seems
aptly aware of the social status that expensive and stylish apparel should communicate.

Despite her past as a former bar-maid, she clothes herself in a modish French negligee made of the finest Lyon silk. However, she is utterly dismayed when Captain Mirvan pretends to mistake her for a lower class laboring woman. She replies angrily: “wash-woman indeed!...Why you han’t no eyes; did you ever see a wash-woman in such a gown as this?—besides, I’m no such mean person, for I’m as good as Lady Howard, and as rich too...I’m no common person...for I’m a person of fashion” (51). In displaying her wealth through an expensive garment, Madame Duval sees herself as a person of means and a person of fashion. She assumes that she will be accepted and respected in London fashionable society. While her apparel displays her financial capabilities and allows her some maneuverability, she never attains complete acceptance in the circles of high life. This is also true for her nieces, the Branghton sisters. As daughters of a silversmith and observers of fashionable people, who have aspirations of belonging to the beau monde, they attempt to dress and participate in fashionable amusements, like the ladies of fashion they watch through their shop window.

The common denominator between Madame Duval, the Branghton sisters, and Mrs. Mittin, is their desire to become part of England’s world of fashion. Neither the Branghton sisters, nor Madame Duval, nor Mrs. Mittin ever express a wish to belong to the elite upper class, but they do want to be part of the fashionable world and attempt to do so. These female characters’ longing to become part of urban social circles highlights the underlying power embedded in
fashion. But their inability to penetrate the core of the *beau monde* reveals the
difficulty of obtaining admittance. With the changing modes shifting to more
informal styles, Madame Duval’s gown is seen as “out” of fashion or too formal
and the Branghton girls’ fashion awareness is not really up to par. For instance, as
they sit by the silversmith shop window and watch the fashionable throng, they see
the fashionable people wearing hats. When they attend the opera, they assume hats
are fashionable, so they wear their hats. But what they do not realize is that hats
are part of the fashionable “undress” for outdoor attire. Hats, usually flat, broad-
brimmed “shepherdess” style accessories made from straw and fastened beneath
the chin with large ribbons were adopted from the country as a type of undress and
were usually worn for outdoor activities, such as walking in the parks, pleasure
gardens, or promenading around town. Caps, made from fabric or fine lace often
with long lappets that were pinned in place, were fashionable indoor attire usually
were placed atop the elaborate hairstyles of the late eighteenth century. But it
seems the Branghton sisters do not recognize the distinction between hats and
caps. Fashionable society adopting and adapting country styles, such as with hats,
also exemplifies that emulation of fashion is not a matter of the lower classes
adopting the styles of the upper class. It is important to note here that the
Branghton sisters placing themselves on display in the window as they watch
fashionable society saunter past the silversmith shop also underscores the complex
relationship between scopophilia and spectacle, that is, in seeing and being seen.

Public appearances and looking like a lady of fashion, for Burney, are
tantamount to being received in society as a person of importance. While Evelina’s
new appearance represents her as a lady, Juliet’s haggardly appearance places her in a lower class position. Even though her bloodline connects her to the upper class, her clothing bespeaks poverty. Thus Juliet’s appearance prevents her from being seen as a lady and therefore thwarts her from being received into fashionable society. Wearing certain clothing thus works in both ways; it either can fabricate a desirable social status or it can reflect a social position that may not accurately signify the wearer’s social status. Similar to Roxana in Daniel Defoe’s *Roxana*, who manages to change identity as easily as she changes her clothes, Burney’s last heroine, Juliet, traverses all social classes as she puts on different apparel. Whereas Defoe’s Roxana transitions from a gentlewoman into poverty through prostitution into a Quaker and finally an aristocratic woman, Juliet’s journey takes her from the aristocracy into the lower working class. This heroine’s problems originate from her father, an English aristocrat who neglects to acknowledge her, but her main difficulties stem from her appearance.

Fleeing from France disguised in tattered, patched clothing with blackened skin, she looks like a runaway servant girl. The women who encounter her in this manner treat her as such. As she puts on expensive second-hand clothing, her appearance returns to that of a beautiful young woman. This clothing makes her appear as a fashionable young lady. But as circumstances force her to leave her new abode, she seeks refuge in the country. To fit in her new surroundings, she “changed, over night, her bonnet, which was of white chip, for one the most coarse and ordinary of straw…and also bought a blue striped apron” (665). Juliet exchanges her stylish clothing for the rustic, country clothes of a young girl Deb,
and is actually mistaken for Deb. Juliet’s social station has not changed since her departure from France, but because of her clothing and her appearance, she manages to maneuver up and down the social scale. As Juliet’s character shows us, clothing and outward physical appearances influence the way in which an individual is perceived and received in eighteenth-century society.

Another woman whose clothing manages to make her appear in a different manner than her actual social position is Camilla’s friend, Mrs. Mittin. When Camilla first meets Mrs. Mitten, she is dressed in a “large black bonnet and a blue checked apron,” but she quickly removes her apron and exposes a “white muslin, embroidered and flounced” underneath (423). As previously discussed in detail, Mrs. Mittin belongs to the working class, but through her access to fashionable clothing, she claims to be a “gentlewoman” and tells Camilla that she uses this disguise to save money and to “do her own way” (424). Choosing at will for her convenience that manner in which she wants to appears, if she so desires, she can engage in activities that are considered not lady-like behavior. At moments of her own preference, she attempts to pass for a gentlewoman, but only so she can socialize with the circles of high life that otherwise would not be open to her. But being the clever woman that she is, she scrutinizes and criticizes all of Camilla’s apparel, telling her that her wardrobe is unsatisfactory for fashionable society. As a result, she gets her cast-off clothing, a nice muslin dress and handkerchiefs. Here we can assume that, because of her limited income and financial resources, the muslin dress she is presently wearing to pass for a gentlewoman is also cast-off
clothing from some other lady of means whom she successfully persuaded to give her, as she does with Camilla.

*Cast-Off Clothing*

Cast-off or second-hand clothing, such as Mrs. Mittin and Juliet wear, provides an important alternative for women to make an appearance like a lady of fashion, and in wearing such apparel they destabilize established class boundaries. As Amy de la Haye and Elizabeth Wilson argue:

In studying the history of dress from the perspective of our own epoch, in which mass-produced clothes have become almost throwaway items, it is important to remember how valuable garments once were, items to be handed down from masters to servants, or, via a will, from one generation to the next, or used as items of exchange and barter. (6)

As Anne Buck points out, clothing was extremely expensive, so it was common for servants to receive “cast-off” clothing from their mistresses. Because the servant or laboring classes, such as that to which Mrs. Mittin really belongs, were in constant contact with social groups above them, they experienced the richer and more decorative styles of the upper classes and grew accustomed to their fineries. This exposure gave the servant class the rare opportunity to experiment with blurring class boundaries through their selection and use of material goods, even if they were second-hand. Socially ambitious mistresses often dressed their serving maids to reflect their own status, creating even more difficulties for the servant class. With clothing signifying social status, servants often grew accustomed to
dressing in extravagant clothing and became discontent with their confining class and clothing.⁹

Even Defoe expresses his increasing confusion and disapproval when class lines can be so easily blurred by the changing of one’s clothes, and he embarrassingly confesses to mistaking a “chamber-jade” for the mistress of the house and saluting her with a kiss:

Servant wenches are so puffed up with pride nowadays, that they never think they go fine enough: it is a hard matter to know the mistress from the maid by their dress; nay, very often the maid shall be much finer of the two...Her neat’s leathern shoes are now transformed into laced ones with high heels; her yarn stockings are tuned into fine woolen ones, with silk clocks; and her high wooden patten are kicked away for leathern clogs; she must have a hoop too, as well as her mistress; and her poor scanty linsey-woolsey petticoat is changed into a good silk one...in short, plain country Joan is now turned into a fine London madam, can drink tea, take snuff, and carry herself as high as the best. (“Everybody’s Business is Nobody’s Business” 3)

Defoe’s anxieties stem from fashion’s apparent capacity to blur social differences seen as necessary to him for the preservation of the class structure. Fashionable clothing and accessories disrupt differences of class lines. Modes of dress no longer clearly indicate one’s class position. In fact, dress can function as a disguise or a tool for an individual to express an imagined or desired position.
As evident in Evelina’s and Camilla’s ability to socialize in fashionable circles and Juliet’s and Mrs. Mittin’s capacity to weave in and out of social classes, the material trappings of fashion become a means for an individual to either invent or express a desired social position. Clothing and accessories thus become a destabilizing agent that disrupts previous rigidly defined social boundaries. As John Styles so aptly argues:

Between the restoration of Charles II in 1660 and the Great Reform Act of 1832, ordinary English men and women enjoyed unprecedented access to novel material things…Most visibly, their bodies were clothed in new fabrics and new fashions—women in calico gowns and muslin neckerchief, men in wigs and silver-plated shoe buckles. Ownership of these novelties was not confined to the narrow ranks of the lords and ladies, country squires, City merchants, sleek lawyers and master manufacturers who comprised the nation’s elite. (2)

Certainly, this account could not be more evident than in the access to cast-off clothing that we see in Burney’s novels. Fashion stretched across all social classes with each adopting whatever appeared fashionable. The demand for fashionable apparel can be seen through Burney’s episodes dealing with women from diverse classes dressing in fashionable clothing, or even variations of the desirable apparel. Fashion moves in both directions, blurring traditionally distinctive class lines. Fluidity, as provided in access to fabrics and changing styles, some of which
are adopted from simplistic country preference, all aided Burney’s female characters in participating in this fascinating *beau monde*.

*Dictates of Fashion*

With visual fashion images exerting a powerful force, the pressure to look like a lady manifested itself in multiple ways. Forces of fashion demanded that a woman not only dress like a lady, but also appear in the public eye as a woman of fashion. Burney shows us how women felt forced to follow the dictates of fashion not only in how they dressed, but also in how they appeared in the public realm. As Burney represents it, a woman needs to appear like a lady of fashion or face the repercussions of social expulsion and ostracism. Camilla experiences such pressure to conform in her excursion in Southampton. She notices how quickly the fashions change and realizes that everything she recently purchased at Tunbridge Wells now appears outdated. She tries to ignore all the latest styles brought by the shopkeepers to Mrs. Berlinton daily, but in their outings, she sees ladies appearing in new, distinguishing apparel placed alongside the unchanged clothes she wore at Tunbridge. After a while, her “little wardrobe exhibited a worse quality than that of not keeping pace with the latest devices of the *ton*; it lost not merely its newness, but its delicacy” (689). Her attempts to spruce-up her wardrobe only make her clothing appear less fashionable than upon her arrival. With the pressure to be in fashion coupled with Mrs. Mittin’s gentle persuasion, Camilla is unable to resist the encouragement to purchase fabric. Thus, she commissions a new stylish dress.
In a similar incident in *The Wanderer*, Burney gives us an example of a woman who is on the brink of starvation, but feels compelled to keep up appearances so that she will not be excluded from social circles. Lady Arramede, widow of a gamester, who once enjoyed prosperous years, struggles to preserve her position in fashionable circles. She still maintains an expensive carriage and hosts extravagant dinners with gala ornaments, but in order to afford them, she endures the “most miserable parsimony in private” (233). Money spent for public appearances comes from the money she saves on daily expenses. Family meals are meager and insufficient, home attire is old-fashioned and patched clothing, and she neglects her daughter’s education. Despite her inclusion in the high circles of the social world, she lives in a “constant alarm lest her pecuniary difficulties should be perceived” (233). In Lady Arramede, Burney gives us a picture of a woman so desperate to participate in fashionable circles that she is willing to take inconceivable measures, even to the point of starving herself and family, to maintain her social position through appearances.

As we see when Cecilia encounters London’s fashionable world, fashion often exerts hypnotic power. Cecilia goes to live with Priscilla Harrel, her former childhood friend who spends all of her days shopping and dressing, and nights are dedicated to large parties: “Immersed in the fashionable round of company and diversion…she had no pleasure but to vie with some rival in elegance, and no ambition but to exceed some superior in expense” (33). Even when they attend the opera, Cecilia discovers that this “brilliant assembly of ladies and gentlemen, collected merely to see and to entertain one another…mixing solely from
necessity” (131-32). That these men and women feel compelled to mingle in social gatherings out of “necessity,” not for the enjoyment of the opera, underscores the power embedded in fashion. During the opera, the ladies ignore the action on stage and are engulfed in their own conversations about “descriptions of trimmings, and complaints of hairdresser” (134). Cecilia questions Priscilla’s lifestyle, but Priscilla only responds that

\[ \text{she did nothing but what every body else did,} \]

and that it was quite impossible for her to \textit{appear in the world} in any other manner…one must live a little like other people. You would not have me be stared at, I suppose; and I am sure I don’t know what I do that every body else does not do too…I am sure we only live like the rest of the world. (193-95)

Priscilla’s reply highlights her understanding of what it takes to retain her social position: namely appearing in the same manner and places as her acquaintances.

Priscilla’s expenditures on fashion and Mr. Harrel’s gambling debts convince Cecilia to rescue the Harrels from an execution on their house and property. The first thing they want to do, however, is go to the Pantheon, a place of fashionable amusement. She challenges their decision, but concerned about the rumor spreading about their financial crisis and most alarmed about risking their reputation and their place in fashionable circles, they agree that “the only refutation that can be given to it, is by our all appearing in public” (273).

Priscilla’s immersion in the circles of fashionable London renders her incapable of realizing her real predicament, that is, the impending collapse of her
household and the horrifying suicide of her husband in Vauxhall, another place of amusement. In fact, D. Grant Campbell goes so far as to argue that her husband “kills himself, not in remote solitude…but within the glare of fashionable society. He kills himself because his place in this fashionable society has disappeared; heavily in debt, he has no money nor the means of fabricating the appearance of money” (131). Even after Cecilia attempts to warn her, Priscilla is terrified of not being seen in public at this fashionable gathering place. The appearance of wealth and displaying one’s wealth or perceived wealth are the motivating factors that drives Priscilla’s desire to see and be seen in public.

In their preoccupation with seeing and being seen, both Lady Arramede and Priscilla exemplify the scopophilic drive and the preoccupation with spectacle in the eighteenth century. These women are more worried over the possibility of being ostracized by fashionable society than anything else. Both are terrified that their fashionable circles of acquaintance will discover their current financial distresses. Both still manage to dress in fashionable attire and host elaborate parties with all the ornamentation one could imagine. These depictions give us a disturbing view of the demanding pressure of belonging to the *beau monde* and seems to indicate that the social force that fashion holds over a society has such a persuasive sway that individuals develop flawed perceptions and become paralyzed with the fear of being excluded from social circles. Burney’s portrayal of fashionable society shows us the driving force of fashion that pushes women to do whatever it takes to keep up social appearances. Fashion not only ignites fierce competition among women to secure the most up-to-date and stylish apparel, but it
also sparks a rivalry for admiration between mini-circles and individuals within the larger circle of high life.

*Embracing and Manipulating the Power of Fashion*

In her portrayal of Georgian society, Burney turns to dressing and keeping up the appearance of a lady as a social critique that investigates the exasperating limitations of women. As a consequence of the restrictions, women turn to the newly emerging world of fashion as a means to escape the constraints, but find instead drawbacks to participating in the social world. It is worth noting that in all four of Burney’s novels and in her journal entries, she cites custom or the social world as a potential tyrant that also attempts to make women subordinated slaves. In four different novels written over the span of four decades, Burney repeats this resounding disturbing indictment of eighteenth-century society. In her journal entry dated 15 June 1769, seventeen-year-old Burney writes:

> O how I hate this vile custom which obligates us to make slaves of ourselves! To sell the most precious property we boast, our Time; & to sacrifice it to every prattling impertinent who chuses to demand it! –yet those who shall pretend to defy this irksome confinement of our happiness, must stand accused of incivility…For why should we not be permitted to be master of our own Time…’tis Custom—Custom which is so woven around us—which so universally commands us—which we all blame—and all obey, without knowing why or wherefore. (7-8)
She goes on later to explain that one of the inconveniences that demands her time is attention to appearance because social customs force her to deal with “caps, hats, and ribbons.” She also explains that those who try to defy it are faced with difficulties. It is also interesting that Burney describes custom as being “woven,” much like the fashionable attire that she finds wastes her time. Here we can see Burney’s frustration when she explains that ownership and authority for a woman in not seen in land or estates, but in her time. But even a woman’s time vies with social expectations and customs.

Burney’s frustration over her society’s fixation on custom and fashion spills over into her fictional accounts of the fashionable world. For Burney, the customs that she is forced to comply with, including the matters of fashions in which a woman feels pressured to appear in public dressed like a lady, have the potential to become an enslaving mechanism. In *Evelina*, Villars explains to Evelina why women are expected to follow social codes: “We are the slaves of custom, the dupes of prejudice, and dare not stem the torrent of an opposing world, even though our judgments condemn our compliance!” (164). As we have explored, the prejudices and wrath of the social world that Villars references can certainly be traced in Burney’s accounts of the social world and the pressures with which her characters feel forced to comply. And in *Cecilia*, Cecilia explains that Priscilla’s decline is a result of her total compliance in the world of fashion: “Slaves of the world as the gay and dissipated…those who toil to please the vain and the idle, undertake a task which can never be finished…may be sacrificed in reality to the folly of saving appearances” (360). In *The Wanderer*, Burney’s most outspoken
and liberated female character Elinor proclaims: “How tenacious a tyrant is
custom! how it clings to our practice! how it embraces our conduct! How it awes
our very nature itself, and bewilders and confounds even our free will! We are
slaves to its laws and its follies, till we forget its usurpation” (174). Both explicitly
and implicitly, these novels argue that the customs of the social world have the
capacity to enslave women. Through Burney’s focus on the world of fashion, she
reveals that one of those customs is society’s obsession with appearance and the
pressure it places on women to embrace the fashions of the day. Perhaps Elinor
explains the anxiety best by equating social customs with the law, a rule or
regulation enforced through a legislative body. But instead of a judicial system, we
can see the social force of fashion that induces women to shop, that is, select,
purchase, and then to display these fashionable goods in the court of the social
realm. These customs, as Burney represents them, encourage women to compete
for admiration by attempting to out-dress one another and present themselves as
objects of desire. These representations also expose not only the limited
opportunities for women, but also in the limited opportunities for empowerment.

Burney, however, does not leave her fashionable ladies flinging their arms
and wringing their hands in despair. Instead all of her female characters that dress
in fashionable attire and appear in public as ladies of consequence emerge as
victors in the social realm. Even after losing her fashionable husband to suicide,
Priscilla remarries a man of substantial financial means and sets herself up in
fashionable life again. Instead of punishing these fashion-obsessed women,
Burney’s embraces the power of fashion and uses it to her characters’ advantage
by turning it into an empowering mechanism. By drawing attention to themselves, Burney’s female characters potential of world of fashion and turns it into an empowering mechanism. Dressed in fashionable gowns and accessories, both Evelina and Camilla experience the world of the *beau monde* and appear as spectacles of fashion. From the very beginning of the novel, however, we are told that Evelina possesses too little wealth to be sought by men of the fashionable world of London, but she manages to marry Lord Orville, the wealthiest man in *Evelina*. In fact, her appearance captivates not only Lord Orville, him, but also Sir Willoughby and Lord Merton. While Willoughby and Merton’s intentions may not be as honorable as Lord Orville’s, her appearance as a fashionable young lady captivates their attention throughout her entire journey through London.

Camilla encounters a similar admiration in her excursions to Tunbridge Wells and Southampton. Her new fashionable apparel makes her the “object of peculiar notice…She was now looked at by all present as if seen for the first time; every one discovered in her some charm, some grace, some excellence” (443). The fashionable Mrs. Albery explains that she should not be surprised by her newly acquired male admirers and contends that Camilla’s fashionable appearance contains power, a power Camilla has not possessed until now:

“See, my dear,” she then added, laughing, “How many weapons you must have in use, if you would govern that strange animal called man! Yet never despair of victory; for, depend upon it, there is not one of the race that, with a little address, you may not bring to your feet.” (397)
Mrs. Arlbery’s advises Camilla to seize this newly acquired power, and she explains how Camilla can use it to her advantage. She tells her: “Know your own power more truly, and use it better. Men, my dear, are all spoilt by humility, and all conquered by gaiety. Amuse and defy them! –attend to that maxim, and you will have the world at your feet…you will find it vastly more convenient to make them your slaves” (446-47). In fact, Burney’s ladies of fashion do exactly as Mrs. Arlbery suggests; they obtain power through becoming objects of fashion. These empowered spectacles of fashion not only exemplify Jonathan Crary’s assessment of how attention invests objects with power, but they also attest to Teresa Riordan’s assessment of female ornamentation and Linda Williams’s concepts of female objectification. By capturing men’s attention through their display of fashionable gowns and accessories, they subvert the enslavement they find in the world of fashion. Instead of remaining as slaves of the fashion world, they make slaves of men. Instead of being the conquered, these ladies of fashion emerge from their dressing rooms suited up in their fashionable apparel and conqueror the social domain.

Notes

1 Tita Chico’s “Privacy and Speculation in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain” Cultural Critique 52 (Fall, 2002): 40-60, argues that “in addition to being seen as a rival of the gentleman’s closet, the dressing room’s function as a stage for a woman’s dressing and undressing prompted a commonplace suspicion that women’s public appearances were not commensurate with their private selves” (42). She goes on to argue that Jonathan Swift’s works on the eighteenth-century woman’s dressing room reflects his concerns…and is a “site of danger—emblematic of women’s potential for independence” (58).


3 See François Boucher’s *A History of Costume in the West* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004) for more on how cotton opened a new field for British industry and for an in-depth perspective on the technical inventions, such as Hargreaves’s spinning Jenny and Watt’s steam engine, that increased the output of textiles. See John Styles’s *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2007).

4 During the Summer 2008, I had the pleasure of visiting the Fan Museum in Greenwich. Several eighteenth-century fans on display reveal differing themes on each side of the fan. For instance, the side that would face onlookers would show an elegant lady with detailed landscape as the background. On the side that faced the owner, there would be an erotic scene, such as a disheveled lady placed in a garden beside her lover.

5 A full account of these encoded messages can be found in the fan maker Duvelleroy’s *The Language of the Fan* published as *Le Language de L’Eventail*.

6 See Amanda Foreman’s *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (New York: Random House, 1998) for a detailed account of how she lead the fashion. Also Linda Colley’s *Britons:Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005) provides a contrasting view between Queen Charlotte’s domesticity and her dislike of plumes to Duchess of Devonshire’s public displays.

7 According to Styles’s *The Dress of the People*, “The silks woven with complex, colourful patterns for women’s gowns at Lyon in France and Spitalfields in London constituted the summit of elite fashion during the late seventeenth century and for much of the eighteenth century. They were expensive and virtually impossible to wash, indeed difficult to clean at all” (110).

8 Madam Duval’s exclusion from England’s fashionable society could also be explained by the growing angst toward France and French fashion. France never adopted hats as fashionable undress: Madame Duval comments: “It’s quite a shocking thing to see ladies come to so genteel a place as Ranelagh with hats on; it has a monstrous vulgar look: I can’t think what they wear them for. There’s no such a thing to be seen in Paris” (59). As Buck points out, fashionable people depended on France as a source of new styles, but some styles were too formal and rejected, such as the *négligé*. In Buck’s study, she refers to Barbara Johnson’s album of sample materials from her dresses. Her most expensive dress was the *négligé* of garnet paduasoy which took twenty-two yards of silk at 10s and was trimmed with fringe. A figured ducape *négligé* of 1767 cost £6.6.6 and its trimming £2.4s. According to Boucher’s *A History of Costume in the West*, “On the whole, eighteenth-century English costume presents a clearly national character, reflecting a climate of opinion which refused to admit French superiority in any field, even in fashion” (323).

9 Lemire’s *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660-1800* also provides valuable insight into the second-hand clothing industry.
CHAPTER IV

TRAVELLING IN STYLE: CIRCULATING SOCIAL STATUS

At this instant, the rapid approach of a carriage caught their ears; and eager to avoid making a decisive reply, she [Indiana] ran to the church-yard gate to look at it, exclaiming: ‘Dear! What an elegant chariot.’ When it came up to the party, it stoppt, and, opening the door himself, Edgar jumped hastily out of it...She then observed his crest and cypher were on the panels; and another entire new set of ideas took instant possession of her mind...Indiana, who, for the first time, thought herself mistress of a new and elegant equipage, was busily employed in examining the trappings and the lining. Camilla (145-146).

In Camilla, the sound of an advancing carriage abruptly interrupts Melmond’s Sunday afternoon walk with Indiana, the young woman he hopes to marry. Captivated by the stylish ride, Indiana deserts Melmond and jumps into Edmund’s carriage. As she examines all the exquisite decorations and furnishings, a “new set of ideas” comes into Indiana’s mind. This fashion-conscious, social-climbing young woman starts envisioning herself married, but instead of settling for Melmond, who “gallops into the park without equipage, without domestics, and mounted on a hired horse,” she imagines marrying a man with an impressive coach. Indiana does not think about a landed estate or a family name. Instead, because of the prestige and social status that accompany being seen in fashionable means of travel, “she did not, indeed, think of marrying any one who could not offer her a coach and four” (634). Being seen in a coach and four or any elaborate carriage will in fact impact Indiana’s sense of social position in many more ways than patriarchal land and the headship of a family (Figure 26). Thus, Melmond’s lack of financial means and social status, which are evidenced in riding a horse he does not own, is
no match for Edmund’s chariot. The distinction between riding a hired horse and owning a coach and four horses is extremely significant to Indiana. It is all about social appearance for Indiana. What matters the most to Indiana is not domestic comfort or finding a companion for marriage, but how an expensive carriage will impact her social standing. It is not the carriage itself that Indiana desires, but it is how she imagines she will appear in public and the social prestige that go along with it.

Figure 26. Expensive and impressive coach and four.
Despite the obvious prominence of carriage scenes in eighteenth-century fiction, the emphasis on different types of transportation has received little critical attention even among scholars interested in mapping out literary responses to and representations of material culture. While Percy G. Adams examines the different uses of the coach motif in eighteenth-century fiction and other scholars have considered privacy issues and conversations in the carriages, few scholars have investigated the significance of Burney’s use of carriages as a means of creating social status or carriages’ impact on eighteenth-century femininity.¹ As Theo Barker and Dorian Gerhold point out:

Until recently the growth of Britain’s road transport has been relatively neglected by historians. Even the attention it did receive was largely concentrated on turnpikes, road building and the improvement of road surfaces rather than upon what really mattered: the growing volume of traffic of various sorts which traveled along the roads. (1)²

While infrastructure improvements are certainly fundamental for investigating eighteenth-century mobility, Burney’s novels emphasize the various types of transportation used in Georgian society and explore why there is a “growing volume” of “various sorts.” In fact, her novels open the door of English society and invite us to explore a world of fashionable society with its unsurpassed elegance and refinement through her depictions of women travelling in carriages in the public sphere. While the tempo for fashion and fashionable entertainment was set in London, it soon spread to neighboring towns. In order to keep up with social
engagements and to be seen among elegant company in fashionable venues, women travelled to seasonal events that occurred in places like Tunbridge Wells, Southampton, Bristol Wells, and Bath. Of course, as Burney’s novels reveal, what mattered was not only attendance, but especially how one arrived. Since appearances of wealth and fashionable possessions were paramount to establishing and maintaining a social position in Georgian England, it is hardly surprising that travel and modes of transportation also provided a means to project social status. No longer satisfied with lavish displays of wealth through contained social settings, members of fashionable society sought to distinguish themselves through their means of mobility.

Carriages in Burney’s novels appear not only as a form of physical transportation for women to and from fashionable amusements, but also as accessories that help to create a social status. These fashion accessories break the chains of aristocratic dominance as the sole arbiter of social power. In doing so, they disrupt the containment through rank in which the divisions of class are tied to a hierarchical structure embedded in landed estate and bloodline of titled names. The visual display of wealth manifested in the ways in which an individual travels spreads across class lines and dislocates the mobility previously limited to royalty and nobility. In fact, the recent cultural development of mobility becomes a means to dismantle the power structure of rank. In a society concerned with a shifting class structure, different means of travel emerge as signifiers of social position. The previous power of exclusive mobility that was contained through patriarchal lineage
becomes reconfigured through the various types of mobility available across class lines.

Since the mobility provided through the various sorts of carriages breaks the restraints of aristocratic privilege, carriages become vehicles of social change. Because Burney’s eighteenth-century readers would have been familiar with the different styles and what those styles communicated about the owners and travelers, specific explanations or depictions about the diverse means of travel were not necessary. But in order to understand the significance of the various styles and what they conveyed to an eighteenth-century audience, it is important to examine in close detail the designs, construction, decorations, and the necessary apparatus that was needed to use carriages. The visual display of carriages calls attention to how the appearance of fashionable objects becomes invested with social power. As a result, the visual presentation of stylish equipage, invested with cultural meaning, becomes a way to create social distinction.

Carriages become a means for Burney’s women to carve out a place for themselves in this changing social environment. As they circulate outside their homes throughout society, from country to city and from city to city, travelling provides opportunities to establish a place for themselves in the social world. Whereas it was customary for young men, especially wealthy aristocrats, to travel throughout England and the continent and to indulge in the gentleman’s Grand Tour, eighteenth-century women were expected to focus on ladylike behaviors, such as singing, dancing, drawing, and other domestic concerns. But Burney’s female characters disrupt this concept of femininity and break the confinement of the
domestic realm as they experience a grand tour of their own through fashionable society. Whereas women did not have entitlement through a landed estate or from the headship of a family, fashion accessories, such as carriages, provide a means to create a social title for themselves. From sightseeing in the English countryside to lavish London balls to fashionable seaside resorts, Burney’s women are “on the go” and concerned not only with where they are going, but also how they get there. By making choices and decisions on where to travel and by riding in certain carriages, these women gain a sense of empowerment through their freedom of movement as they travel independently. Burney’s carriage scenes provide a means of endowing her female characters with an independence that reshapes images of eighteenth-century femininity, not in the privacy of domestic parlors, but in the public eye. Scenes from Burney’s novels show women travelling in the prestigious coach and four, the open curricle that was sportive and fast, the luxurious landau, and the stylish phaeton that women preferred to show off their latest fashions. While these women in motion instigate travel in carriages that they own, the carriages provide a carefully orchestrated journey for Burney’s heroines into fashionable society. Burney’s novels license female mobility by associating it with female independence. Travelling in stylish carriages gives women a visual presentation of social status as they circulate in and throughout fashionable venues.

*Dismantling Rank and Reconfiguring Status*

With the *beau monde* wielding its social power through fashion and fashionable display, Burney’s novels show us how stylish carriages become a means to restructure social positions. In Burney’s world of fashion, an individual’s social
standing is not determined by one’s inherited rank, but by how one travels. One such mode of travel that Burney uses to destabilize the social authority of rank and elevate travelling as a determinant of social status is walking. While greater than ever members of middling and upper class families had the financial means to purchase carriages, many individuals still could not afford to own a carriage and depended on walking as a means of travel. But, as Burney shows, fashionable society clearly distinguished between someone walking as a means of travel and someone walking for pleasure. Walking as a leisurely amusement, such as rambling in pleasure gardens, was regarded as a fashionable pastime, while walking as a form of transportation was frowned upon and viewed as engaging in disgraceful behavior (Figure 27). As a result, people who used walking as a means of mobility became labeled as members of a lower social status.

In Burney’s novels, walking, whether for pleasure or for a means of travel, manifests itself as a determinant of social status. Interestingly, all of Burney’s heroines, regardless of financial ability, participate in fashionable walking and have access to carriages for travel. Evelina, even though her wealthy father finally acknowledges her at the end of the novel, manages to penetrate fashionable society and participate in pleasure walking and riding in a variety of carriages even in her orphaned state. And both Camilla and Cecilia join in fashionable promenading in London and travel to pleasure resorts in fashionable carriages. But it is through her character Juliet, the only heroine who is the rightful heiress of a mass fortune, that we see how inherited rank is disregarded and replaced with a social status that stems from her means of travel. Juliet is the only heroine who has travel difficulties and
who is reduced to walking and the social scorn that goes along with walking as a means of travel.

Figure 27. Ladies participating in fashionable walking.

Despite Juliet’s bloodline connection to the wealthy, aristocratic Melbury family, she falls prey to the social prejudices that are associated with walking. Juliet arrives on England’s shores as a disguised French émigré, and her nameless, penniless appearance creates havoc for her. But her primary problem stems from her mother’s lawful, but clandestine marriage to the Earl of Melbury’s only son, Lord Granville, during his visit to France. Besides the hidden marriage, her mother’s
untimely death during childbirth causes her more difficulties by leaving her an orphan. Because of his wife’s lowly birth and the Earl’s prejudice, Lord Granville decides to keep his marriage and daughter a secret until he can be master of his own life. Lord Granville leaves Juliet in a French convent with a governess and resumes his own life. He remarries and has a new family, and even though he makes provisions in his will for the daughter he left in France, he dies before he can publically acknowledge her.

During the escalating violence of the French Revolution, Juliet is forced to flee, and she arrives on English soil under mysterious circumstances. Without a name and access to her rightful financial resources, she wanders from town to town and occupation to occupation. As Juliet encounters other women, Burney’s descriptions often paint unflattering pictures of women who are trying to obtain or maintain social status. These women, in fact, appear snobbish and pretentious. In one such instance, Burney’s character, Mrs. Maple, attempts to maintain her social position by degrading Juliet. Juliet finds herself stranded without access to her money, but she desperately needs to travel eight miles to Brighthelmstone. When Mrs. Maple suggests that Juliet should walk, two gentlemen question how Juliet will manage considering the condition of the roads, the distance, and the fact that it is December. To this opposition she responds: “And why not gentlemen? How would you have such a body as that go, if she must not walk? What else has she got feet for?” (61). Because of Juliet’s assumed lower class station and Mrs. Maple’s desire to remain distinguished, Mrs. Maple sees no problem with insisting Juliet walk eight miles in wintry conditions.
Hoping to find relief from the closed, snobbish circles of fashionable society, Juliet seeks refuge in the country. However, even here she meets with social prejudices placed against her due to her means of travel:

A solitary stranger, bearing her own small baggage, after travelling all night, was not very likely to be seen but with eyes of scrutiny and suspicion… but when [the upper class of tradespeople] found that she enquired for a lodging, without giving any name, or any reference, they held back, alike, from granting her admission… In the smaller shops, and by the meaner and poorer sort of people, her carrying her parcel herself, levelled her, instantly, to their own rank…. and, almost with one accord, they bluntly told her that she might find a lodging at an inn. (656)

Since Juliet travels by walking and carries her own luggage, the tradespeople misjudge her and conclude she is a woman who is undeserving of their hospitality. Even though the tradespeople are clearly beneath her rightful social position as the heir of an aristocratic family, Juliet is treated with disdain and refused lodgings.

Despite Juliet’s familial link to the aristocracy, walking gives her the outward appearance of belonging to the lower social order. As she continues walking and carrying her own parcels, she approaches the lower class neighborhood; however, they, too, assume she is member of their own lower social order. In order to elevate their sense of superiority, they demean her in assuming superiority over her and send her away. Here Burney shows us that it is not her actual position, but the way in which she appears and the way in which she travels that determines how
society treats her. Ironically, Mr. Tedman, a common tradesman, can afford to keep a coach and horses because of his income as the local grocer. However, when Juliet needs transportation, he apologizes to her for not offering her a ride. He is afraid to take her into his coach because of her assumed lower class. He fears that allowing her to ride in his coach would not look agreeable to the fashionable people of his social circles. Juliet’s arrival in Brighthelmstone on foot and not by a stylish carriage signals to the townspeople her lower class station. Juliet’s actual bloodline connection to the upper class and Mr. Tedman’s tangible financial means earned through his grocery store, however, shows how class divisions are not congruent with determining an individual’s social status. In a society obsessed with appearance, walking is far more than a means of travel; it is a social determinant of social status.

On the other hand, *The Wanderer’s* Lady Arramede goes to great lengths to hide her family’s pecuniary difficulties in order to maintain her social status. She sacrifices every comfort of home, including giving her family insufficient meals and wearing tattered, old clothing in private, to retain their carriage. By keeping her carriage and refusing to be reduced to walking, she retains her social position and avoids the social ostracizing that accompanies walking as a means of travel. Despite Lady Arramede’s insufficient finances, she makes the public appearance of one who can afford a carriage. In these episodes, walking is used as a social marker, and it seems that what really matters is not one’s actual social position or financial means, but how one appears and the way in which one travels.
But, as Burney shows us, other forms of public transportation emerged that linked social status to one’s mode of travel. While a primitive version of public transportation originated during the Roman era, public stage coaches became a popular form of transportation during the late seventeenth century. Public coaches offered an inexpensive way for travelling long distances, especially for people who did not own their own carriages. Painted in bright, sometimes gaudy, colors, with the names of their destinations, and often accented with running foxes, coach horns, and crossed whips, stage coaches made conspicuous visual presentations as they crisscrossed England’s countryside. Riding on coaches, however, meant being crammed in tight spaces with passengers, packages, and supplies. In Burney’s world, this public mode of travel created another marker that helped in determining an individual’s social status (Figure 28). Travelling by private coach meant one owned a carriage, suggesting the owner possessed wealth and a prestigious social status, whereas the appearance of travelling by public stage coach supposedly signified a meaner class station.

*The Wanderer’s* Mrs. Maple expresses her disdain for stage coaches and the inferior people that they convey. In one episode, she and other fashionable ladies are lounging by the fireplace in an inn parlor when Juliet enters the room. Stunned that Juliet, whom she assumes is from a lesser social position, should encroach upon their space, Mrs. Maple exclaims: “...are we to go on further as if we live all of our lives in a stage coach? Why can’t that body as well stay in the kitchen?” (23-24). Mrs. Maple’s reaction to Juliet’s presence and her retort about feeling as if she were on a stage coach not only reveals her prejudice toward individuals whom she
considers beneath her, but also shows her attitude toward public transportation. While middling classes did travel on stage coaches in extreme emergency, fashionable women, such as Mrs. Maple and her acquaintances, would never degrade themselves by travelling on a public coach. To ladies like these, travelling in this manner is intended for subordinate individuals, just as the kitchen is a place for subservient people.

Figure 28. Eighteenth-century public stage coach.
Even though Burney uses stage coaches to reveal how a particular type of transportation can help to determine social status, she takes advantage of a different form of public conveyance to show how transportation blurs class distinctions. Despite the refusal of her fashionable women to travel by stage coach, Burney’s characters from across all social classes use hackney coaches for public conveyance in London. Hackney coaches became a popular and customary means of travel during the eighteenth century (Figure 29). Since a variety of people travelled by these public conveyances and fashionable society arrived at social gatherings in them, hackney coaches became a vehicle that could camouflage one’s actual social class. These public coaches were often discarded town coaches of wealthier classes that operated out of inn yards and coach stands located near main streets. Each coach required a license and a plate displaying an assigned number, while rates and even coachman’s behavior was strictly enforced by rules and regulations. An established fare schedule for trips to different parts of London made travel fast and convenient. Instead of sending to the stables and waiting for one’s own carriage to be harnessed and brought around, people of financial means found that hiring a hackney coach was a much more efficient and expeditious way to maneuver around London. According to Smith, “By 1775 there were four hundred registered stage-coaches, while numerous hackney coaches… plied for hire in city streets” (23). In fact, hackney coaches were so numerous that they created traffic problems in the streets of London. This forerunner of the taxicab transported not only wealthier customers, but anyone else who could afford the hiring fee.
Regardless of their social class or financial means, Burney’s characters often arrive at fashionable amusements by way of this public transportation. In one such incident in *Evelina*, Madame Duval’s arrival in London means that she has left her own carriage abroad in France. But in order to travel around London, she travels in a hackney coach, making her indistinguishable from everyone else. In one episode, she is forced to share a coach with Captain Mirvan and Sir Clement Willoughby. Journeying to the fashionable Ranelagh, the coach contains Madame Duval, a former tavern girl who only married into money; Sir Willoughby, a wealthy, aristocratic gentleman who happens to own a fashionable chariot; and Captain Mirvan, a rough, unpolished sea captain who happens to be the husband of a fashionable, wealthy lady. Whether a person is a member of the upper echelons of society by birthright or someone who belongs to fashionable society through the means of earned money, any person who could afford the fare used the hackney coach. Hence, the hackney coach, unlike the stage coach, became a leveling device that disrupted traditional class lines. Once a person paid the fee and travelled in a hackney coach, it was utterly impossible to distinguish individual classes. Whether it is Juliet’s walking scenes in which her bloodline does not determine how she is received, or it is Mrs. Maple’s mistreatment of Juliet based on her means of travel, traditional lines of rank become subordinated to social status which is achieved through many means, one of which is how one travels. Because of the inclusivity of hackney coaches, travelling by this means of public transportation, as Burney shows us, overshadows class distinctions.
Visual Appearance and Social Distinction

In order to understand the cultural significance of the changing modes of travel and how the development of various designs was instrumental in creating social distinction in the eighteenth century, it is important to look briefly at the historical development of transportation. Although the use of horse-drawn vehicles dates back to ancient Egypt and the Greeks constructed special chariots for their Olympic Games, it was the Roman chariots used for fast travel and military purposes that instigated road and bridge building in England. The Roman’s interest in roadways and their military prowess led to the expansion of the Roman Empire across three continents and the spread of their development of civil engineering. But
following the collapse of the Empire, the system of roadways fell into disarray and travel in England came close to a standstill. Towards the end of the middle ages, however, better vehicles to transport merchandise and agricultural goods were needed as the population and commerce increased.

By the mid-sixteenth century, improved roadways and passenger vehicles, which were already symbols of wealth and prestige in Western Europe, made their way to England. According to D. J. Smith’s *Discovering Horse-Drawn Carriages*, Early coaches in Britain were imported from Holland and Germany…Henry Fitzallen, Earl of Arundel, imported a coach from Germany that was the envy of society and closely copied by those able to afford such luxuries. Queen Elizabeth I, not to be outdone by her courtiers, ordered several coaches from Dutch builders. (14)

While the nobility and royalty had elaborate carriages and coaches designed to reflect the power and wealth of their realms and estates, the common person could not afford such extravagance and expense. Inadequate roadways and large, heavy cumbersome coaches hampered long distance land travel. However, during the second half of the eighteenth century, turnpike systems and improved road surfaces instigated more movement outside of London. Equally important to increased travelling and the development of road transport was increasing wealth and the interest in amusement, such as seaside resorts, throughout England. As David Wheeler argues, “what made Bath boom as a leisure center were the eighteenth century’s vast accumulation of capital and its transport revolution of turnpikes and public coaches providing the middle class with the means and time to travel” (122).
The increasing amount of wealth and leisure time and the increasing emphasis on travelling for fashionable entertainment put pressure on manufacturers of transportation to provide more means of travel.

As carriage makers sought to meet the increasing demands of travel, new potential customers not only wanted a way to travel, but they also wanted ways to socially distinguish themselves. Here we can see how the changing designs and the increasing variety of carriages intersect with the increasing spread of financial wealth and the whimsical nature of fashion. Francis T. Underhill’s guidebook for carriage and horse owners, *Driving Horse-Drawn Carriages For Pleasure*, provides useful insight into the age of horse-drawn transportation. He argues:

> The more eccentric the type, the shorter lived it is and the sooner it must be supplanted. This quality is just what is wanted by our rapidly growing class of nouveau riches. They wish their acquaintances to know that they buy a new carriage every year, so the more noticeable the change the better they are suited. Who can blame the coachmakers for catering to this class, who form really their best-paying patrons?

(135)

Carriage makers, much like car manufacturers of today, recognized that the appearance of wealth and fashionable possessions was paramount to establishing and maintaining a social position. In order to target their new potential buyers and in order to retain them as return customers, they designed different makes and models that were noticeably different. Different types of carriages, as well as the number of horses and servants needed for that particular carriage, provided a means
to project a visible social status. In addition to the cost of the carriage, owners also had the expense of harnesses, horses, livery, and other accessories. If the owner possessed sleek equipage and high quality livery, these were outward indicators of the owner’s importance and wealth. If a family owned more than one vehicle, that meant they possessed substantial income. With a broader spectrum of society indulging in more frequent travels, manufacturers had to keep up with the demands of a more mobile society. As a result, as William Felton points out, carriage makers constructed various types of vehicles to meet the various incomes of the increasing mobilized classes. The Georgian era saw the emergence of the privately owned coachmen-driven coaches, barouches, landaus, post chaises and owner-driven phaetons, curricles, and gigs.

While these carriages provided physical mobility for Burney’s women as they travelled from place to place, they also became creators and carriers of social status. With worth no longer solely inherent in blood lines or family names, visual manifestations of wealth, such as those found in specific styles and types of carriages, emerged as signifiers of social status. Social clout became defined not only by what one bought and wore, but also what one owned, drove, and where one went. Being seen riding in a fashionable carriage became synonymous with holding an influential social status; therefore, social currency resided in the way in which one travelled, conveying onto the passenger a particular social status that stemmed from a material possession.

Regardless of the place in society conferred on them through birth or financial means, Burney’s heroines travel freely by post chaise and engage
unreservedly in fashionable society in their journeys through England. Despite her orphaned condition and her lack of financial wealth, on Evelina’s return home to Berry Hill from London, she does not use the public stage. Instead she travels by the luxurious and expensive post chaise. Her choice of travel suggests that after her extended stay in London among fashionable society, she understands the cultural meanings attached to being seen in certain kinds of carriages. Aware of the demeaning associations of travelling by stage coach, as she witnesses in Madame Duval’s treatment when she travels by this means, and aware of the deference that Mrs. Mirvan gains from her prestigious modes of travel, Evelina prefers to be regarded with respect that she knows travelling by post chaise will give her.

“Going by post or post chaise” was a much more expensive way to travel than by stage coach. It meant a person would either own or hire a private coach or chariot and rent horses that were changed periodically at designated inns. The larger constructed coach could seat and transport four or more passengers while the chariot only contained a seat for two people that faced forward. Depending on the size of the carriage and the speed desired, two or four horses would be used to draw the carriage. Instead of being coachman driven as the town coaches, a mounted driver known as a postillion, usually a young boy, rode one horse to guide the chaise. Often post chaises contained a rumble seat on the back for family servants, and the box seat with its elaborate cover was removed to allow extra space for luggage. According to Smith, gentlemen used the travelling chariot or post chaise “for a grand tour of continental Europe, with door panels emblazoned with a family crest or monogram” (36). For Burney, however, travelling by post chaise was the means
to carry her heroines on their grand tour of fashionable society (Figure 30). Because of the expense and the financial means needed to travel in this way, travelling post chaise was seen as a prestigious way to travel. Post chaises were almost always painted yellow which assured their outstanding visibility as they journeyed throughout the countryside.

Figure 30. Post chaise with postillions.

The visual presentation of the numerous designs helps to turn transportation into vehicles of social distinction. The varying decorations, styles, and construction became synonymous with the varying degrees of social status. One way people set themselves apart was through artistic ornamentation. Artisans, painters, and carvers were solicited and employed to create works of art out of these travelling status symbols. As Cecil Robertson’s Coachbuilding Past and Present points out:
Every conceivable form of elaborate embellishment was employed in decorating coaches. Panels were beautifully painted, sometimes representing complete scenes with landscape and figures, sometimes divided into diamonds or squares, each bearing a floral pattern or heraldic device. Even the wheels were ornamented; the spokes were carved, the rims molded, and the naves [hub of a wheel] embossed. The interiors were upholstered in brocaded silk or velvet. (13-14)

Besides the picturesque scenes, the decked-out wheels, and the embellished interiors, another popular signifier was the family coat of arms, such as appears on Edmund’s coach that catches Indiana’s eye.

Identification through a coat of arms originated in the medieval era when knights were fully suited in armor. In order to distinguish themselves as either friend or foe and to receive credit for heroic deeds, knights wore special colors and insignia in the battlefield. Often these were embroidered on sleeveless jacket that were worn over the armor, or they could be placed on helmets. By the fifteenth century, the coat of arms spread from military entities as symbolic of power and strength to a means of identification and social distinction in an illiterate society. These identifying marks usually include a motto, an emblem, and other marks to distinguish one bearer from another. The eighteenth century witnessed an increasing use of crests as more and more individuals adopted the popular fashion of displaying them on their coaches (Figure 31). But because of the social distinction linked to using these symbols, even families without military history began to assume a coat of arms or family crest despite their lack of entitlement.
The placement of family crests was not the only way to distinguish oneself socially. Owning a coachman-driven carriage with livery was the ultimate means to establish a prestigious social status, such as we see in Mrs. Berlinton’s and Mrs. Ireton’s lavishly dressed livery. Coach owners dressed their servants employed for servicing the coach in specific outfits. These distinctive uniforms followed the same insignia, color schemes, and symbols as the family coat of arms. As the coach approached from a distance, long before the identifying marks on the vehicle could be seen, the men riding on the outside of the coach in their distinguishing clothing helped to identify whose coach was arriving. Hence, the livery also served as a visual status statement. If an individual could afford to pay a coachman, a groomsman, a footman, and other coach servants, this makes a visual proclamation
about an individual’s income and wealth. But the physical appearance of the livery and other servants was also a significant factor in presenting a fashionable package. Underhill’s guidebook provides detailed instructions of the strict expectations in the physical appearance of the coachman and livery:

Good liveries are essential to a well-appointed equipage...The very position of the servants contributes largely toward the general finish. Put a slouchy mustached coachman on the box of the best generally appointed carriage procurable, and tis good points go for naught. No private coachman wears a mustache or beard, and the presence of such can invariably be considered an indication of ignorance of his calling. Such a man may be a good strapper...but he should never be employed as a coachman. (6)

He goes on to explain specific requirements about the number of buttons, the length of breeches, the correct cut and fit of a coat, and the proper care of boots. In addition, he gives a list of clothing and supplies with which each servant should be equipped. 5

In addition to the lavish display of livery, the expensive and impressive town coaches and travelling coaches required the employment of an experienced coachman for driving and the assistance of groomsmen and/or footmen (Figure 32). Four horses were needed to draw this heavy, four wheeled, enclosed carriage; hence, the emergence of the popular phrase, “coach and four.” Learning the driving technique of “four- in-hand” was no easy task. According to Smith, “Driving a four-in-hand...became the ambition of every schoolboy. The professional
coachman was for many years ‘king of the road’, tipped and treated by his passengers, frequently bribed by young bloods to allow them a few minutes with the ribbons (reins)” (49).

Figure 32. Coachman sitting properly with reins in one hand.

Learning this method was an arduous undertaking with the young man gradually stepping from mastering one to two and finally four horses. This technique meant handling a team of four horses all at once by holding all four reins between his fingers with the left hand, while holding the whip in the right. Four-in-hand not only included learning to manage four horses with one hand, but it also included learning the proper way to appear, which included the correct way to mount the box seat, the best form to sit atop the box seat, and the suitable way to hold the reins
and whip. So it can be little surprise that when the fashion-conscious Indiana envisions herself getting married, she wants a husband who can provide a coach and four (Figure 33). That she specifically thinks of this particular carriage suggests that she is also imagining how she will appear riding in her crest embellished carriage framed with her fashionably dressed livery and coachman.

Figure 33. The stylish coach and four.
But being seen in a magnificent coach and four was not the only means of travel to increase a woman’s standing in the social world. Other designs, such as the landau, also provided ways that disrupted the power of class ranks with the power of fashionable display. The lavish landau, though originally from Germany, gained increasing popularity throughout England’s fashionable society. Not surprisingly, *The Wanderer’s* Mrs. Ireton owns the impressive landau and uses it to market her social importance as she takes a pleasure outing to Arundel Castle. Mrs. Ireton, an elderly woman of a previous middling class status who only married into wealth, now feels compelled to maintain her social position. With a broader spectrum of society now having access to financial resources and material possessions, she feels threatened that she will lose her social clout. She attempts to maintain her position by belittling women whom she believes to be of a lower social rank and by parading her material accumulations with a conceited and mean-spirited attitude. In one instance, Mrs. Ireton fails with her previous attempts to impress Juliet with her house and lavish breakfast party. Upon their earlier arrival to Grosvenor Square, Mrs. Ireton watches Juliet as they approach her extraordinary house:

But her glance met no gratification. The young woman, instead of admiring the house, and counting the number of steps that led to the vestibule, or of windows that commanded a view of the square, only cast her eyes upwards, as if penetrated with thankfulness that her journey was ended. Surprised that stupidity should thus be joined with cunning, Mrs. Ireton now intently watched the impression which, when her servants appeared, would be made by their rich liveries. (47)
Without any regard for Mrs. Ireton’s massive steps, impressive vestibule, numerous windows, or richly dressed servants, Juliet bids her good day. In a later episode, Mrs. Ireton again fails to convince Juliet of her social importance after she hosts an elaborate breakfast with an impressive guest list. But these unsuccessful efforts do not quench Mrs. Ireton’s driven desires to intimidate Juliet. Instead, she forces her to accompany her on a country outing in her extravagant landau. Mrs. Ireton’s repeated displays of her material accumulation reveals her desperate attempt to uphold the practices of a fashion-driven society in which social definition and status revolve around consumption and the display of consumption. Mrs. Ireton dwells in the realm where material goods seem to turn perception into reality.

What made the landau especially enticing as a social vehicle was its dual function as a summer pleasure-riding vehicle and its capacity as a winter vehicle. With its exclusive design of a fold back or removable top, the landau not only offered winter protection from inclement weather, but it also provided a means for “taking air” on summer outings. The top or hood was designed to split down the middle and fold back, allowing for alternative ways of riding. Both the front and rear sections could be lowered or just the back part could be let down, while the front section could remain in place or be removed altogether. These sections latched together over the top of a small window that was fitted to the top of door. This window was designed to let down inside the door when the top was folded back.
This predecessor of the convertible provided ideal conditions for trips to seaside resorts and sightseeing tours in the country (Figure 34). Its low shell or canoe-shaped body and vis-à-vis seats provided maximum visibility of its occupants to display their fashionable clothing. While the coachman rode on a raised upholstered bench seat, the groom had a separate seat on the back that prevented him from being forced to stand for the duration of the trip. Landaus could be postillion-driven, but most often were driven by a coachman with four-in-hand (Figure 35). By the mid-1800s, the five-glass landau sported glass panels that began to replace the folding front section (Figure 36). Another feature that endowed the landau with prestige was its step covers which folded out as the door opened. This technique always exposed a clean surface for the passengers to enter and exit.  

Figure 34. Convertible styled landau.
Another popular coachman-driven carriage that Burney uses to reveal how transportation is a key element in a woman gaining and maintaining social clout is the vis-à-vis. *Cecilia’s* Mrs. Harrel chooses to be seen strolling around in her vis-à-vis to help her keep up appearance during her husband’s financial demise. In the midst of bankruptcy and financial destitution Mrs. Harrel continues her daily routine in fashionable society, that is, visiting, participating in assemblies, and attending
pleasure amusements. Cecilia questions her behavior when she is on the verge of financial ruins, but Mrs. Harrel assures her “*she did nothing but what every body did*, and it was quite impossible for her to *appear in the world* in any other manner” (193). Mrs. Harrel realizes that in order to keep her social position in the midst of their financial crisis, she must appear in a certain way. That certain way means to be seen arriving at fashionable gatherings in style in a trendy carriage. The vis-à-vis seated two passengers who faced each other on opposite cross seats. As a slender version of the formal berline, it was used for semi-formal town driving. The high box seat for the coachman and the rear platform that could carry two or more footmen made an impressive visual presentation through London’s streets.

While the coachman-driven carriages with their impressive livery emerged as one factor that helped to create a powerful visual presentation, with the increasing demand for fashionable ways to travel, owner-driven carriages made a widespread appearance. Whereas coachman-driven carriages depended on ostentatious display, owner-driven carriages supplied a sportive, fashionable way to travel. One of the most coveted designs was the phaeton. The lady of fashion in *Camilla*, Mrs. Arlbery, takes Camilla on a pleasure sightseeing trip to Mount Ephraim. On this outing, something spooks the horses, and they plunge down the hill. Camilla and Mrs. Arlbery barely escape, and the accident kills one horse, leaves the other disabled, and totally destroys the phaeton into fragments. Despite this near encounter with death, Mrs. Arlbery declares that the accident “would do her infinite good, by making her a rigid economist; for she could neither live without a phaeton, not yet build one, and buy ponies, but by parsimonious savings from all other
expenses” (405). Here we see that regardless of the cost or the danger, Mrs. Arlbry intends to own a phaeton. Undoubtedly, she feels she cannot live without one because of the fashionable statement that she makes as she is seen driving around in this prized vehicle (Figure 37).

![Figure 37. Fashionably dressed ladies riding in stylish phaeton.](image)

This owner-driven racer adopted its name from the mythological Phaeton, the young and inexperienced son of Helios, the Sun God, who drove the Sun Chariot too fast and lost control, almost crashing it. Fortunately, Zeus intervened and prevented him from colliding with the Earth. Phaetons were light, swift vehicles usually mounted on four larger wheels with a high body and elevated seat, which
made them extremely susceptible to overturning, hence, the adoption of the name. Many of Burney’s carriage scenes deal with phaeton mishaps. Most of these vehicles had a half-hood, but were normally kept in the lowered position. After all, the point was to be seen riding around the park or town in fashionable clothing. The remarkable height of the early phaetons ignited a firestorm about owning one. Accordingly, the reputation gained by owning a phaeton resulted in various shapes and sizes to suit individual taste, ranging from the early Perch-High with its rear wheels stretching eight feet high and its front wheels five feet to styles lower to the ground, such as the Park Phaeton, that accommodated ladies’ enormous dresses. Some styles, such as the Gentleman’s Phaeton contained a rumble seat for the groomsmen when short distance travel required assistance. According to Underhill, the George IV phaeton, also known as Highflyer or Park Phaetons heads the list, and is the most dignified of all carriages for ladies’ driving. It is thoroughly luxurious in outline, and demands the smartest possible turning out. No vehicle is better suited to display a fashionable costume. A well-dressed woman driving a brilliant, well-mannered, and nicely rounded pair of matched horses, and attended by a single groom in immaculate livery, either a tidy lad or an older man who is slight and short, presents a most charming picture…they are very expensive carriages, and there being comparatively few persons owning stables which would admit of their use, they will be found difficult to dispose of except at a very great sacrifice. (139-40)
As we can see here in Underhill’s explanation, this particular style was specifically designed to show-off women’s fashionable attire (Figure 38). In spite of the danger associated with riding in these high-wheeled, unstable vehicles, women still decided to travel in these sportive carriages. In addition to flaunting their dresses, the elevated body of the carriage and the diminished appearance of her groomsman not only accentuate a woman’s elevated position, but these features also focus attention on the fashionable lady.

![Figure 38. Park riding in phaeton.](image)

Besides owning an impressive coach and the highly stylish phaeton, the fashionable Mrs. Arlbery also owns the sportive and fast curricle (Figure 39). These means of transportation help to establish Mrs. Arlbery’s social status as an
influential member of the social world. During one of her social outings, she takes Camilla for a drive in her curricle to a breakfast honoring her niece, Miss Dennel. According to Underhill,

The curricle was for years one of the most fashionable town carriages…It was described as being drawn by a pair of horses perfectly matched in size, colour, quality, and step; the harness being profusely decorated with silver ornaments, united by a silver bar, which supported a silver-mounted pole; preceded or followed by two grooms mounted on another pair of horses equally matched with the first, secured the driver and his companion a superb effect, which combined the maximum of expense with the minimum of convenience. (143)

The curricle was a two-wheeled open carriage with a collapsible half-hood and a rear seat for a groomsman. This light vehicle was sportive, and fast and usually drawn by two horses that walked with even steps and paces. Fast and stylish because of the meticulously matched horses, the curricle was extremely expensive to maintain. This precursor to the sports-car only had room to transport a driver and passenger. This luxurious means of travel was used for travelling and pleasure riding in parks and on outings. Similar to the eye-catching Corvette, the main purpose of this vehicle was to show off. What this suggests about the owner, Mrs. Arlbery, is that she is all about being seen not only in fashionable attire and fashionable amusements, but also in a fashionable vehicle.
The world of fashion that we see through these descriptions of eighteenth-century carriages indicates that visual appearance is a key component in Georgian society. The matched horses, lavishly decorated carriages, carriages with wheels eight feet tall, the elaborate workmanship on the harnesses, the well-dressed livery, the number of servants one employs, and dressing to display fashionable attire all point to how these seemingly insignificant vehicles emerge as creators and conveyors of social status. As a woman is seen riding, driving, travelling, and arriving in style, the visual presentation helps in establishing and maintaining a woman’s position in the *beau monde*. Looking at these detailed descriptions underscores how carriages capture the attention of a spectator audience. As Crary proposes, these objects of fashionable transportation became invested with social power, thereby providing a means for social distinction.

*Female Mobility and Independence*

Perhaps the most significant way in which Burney shows us the social impact of these fashionable carriages is in the independence that it gives her female
characters. Interestingly, the female characters who travel without restraint are either single or widowed and are devoid of any male authority. Burney’s married women, however, experience no such form of freedom. In one instance in *Camilla*, fifteen-year-old Miss Dennel’s illusions of liberty shatter after her arranged marriage to a wealthy, but elderly country squire, Mr.Lissin. Despite her visions of freedom that she imagines will include a house, servants, and equipage of her own, her misconception of independence and of “being her own mistress” are shattered early in her marriage. After an episode in which she decides to order the coach for herself to visit Mrs. Arlbery, her husband abruptly interrupts her outing and demands she return home. After her marriage, the new Mrs. Lissin expresses her frustration in her new “state of bondage,” because even the coachmen refuse to obey her orders. She expresses her disappointment in “becoming the property of another, to whom she made over a legal right to treat her just as he pleased” (910). Through Miss Dennel and other married women, such as *Evelina*’s Mrs. Mirvan and *Camilla*’s Mrs. Tyrold, Burney exposes the constraints of liberty imposed on the eighteenth-century woman through marriage in which a woman passes from one hand of masculine authority into another. Burney suggests that becoming mistress of a household and equipage through marriage only guarantees a life of prescribed expectations and responsibilities. Most importantly, marriage certainly hampers a woman’s liberty as far as travelling is concerned.11

Despite the likely social repercussions against women travelling in public, especially alone, Burney’s unattached female characters thwart any social whispers of impropriety and travel unaccompanied by male companions. To deter eighteenth-
century women engaging in public outings, more conduct books emerged and addressed the issues concerning women’s excessive travelling. In *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters*, John Gregory addresses how travelling in carriages not only creates health problems for women, but also compromises their reputations:

I would particularly recommend to you those exercises, that oblige you to be much abroad in the open air, such as walking...This will give vigour to your constitutions, and a bloom to your complexions. If you accustom yourselves to go abroad in chairs and carriages, you will soon become enervated, as to be unable to go out of doors without them. They are, like most articles of luxury, useful and agreeable when judiciously used; but, when made habitual, they become both insipid and pernicious...By continually gadding abroad, in search of amusement, you lose the respect of all your acquaintances, whom you oppress with those visits, which, by a more discreet management, might have been courted. (99-100)

This scathing indictment of women travelling around in carriages attempts to discourage women from participating in this activity. Gregory teaches that fashionable walking is more health beneficial than riding in carriages. After all, a woman cannot stray far from home if she is confined to walking. If a woman is restricted to walking, that would mean no trips to seaside resorts, no sightseeing in the country, and not attending pleasure amusements. More importantly, he argues that travelling around will result in a woman losing her most prized possession, her reputation. What Gregory’s assessment totally ignores is how travelling might affect
men. It appears that health complications and damage to one’s reputation that can result from travel are gender specific.12

Burney, however, totally disregards such warnings as her heroines go “gadding abroad.” In fact, Burney seems to scoff at any hint of impropriety about women travelling alone. Burney’s female mobility challenges restrictions on women prescribed by Gregory and other moral commentators. While Gregory exhorts women to participate in fashionable walking, Burney recommends that women to travel for pleasure and leisure. In doing so, she reverses the terms of Gregory’s objections to female mobility. In Madam Duval’s visit to London, she ardently protests and refuses to travel around town to Ranelagh Gardens without a male escort. When Mrs. Mirvan offers Madam Duval a seat in her carriage, she appears appalled that “four females should go all together” and declares that “she would by no means go so far without a gentleman, and [wondered] how so polite a lady could make so English a proposal” (58). Madame Duval’s former lower class position as an English tavern girl stimulates her aspirations for social approval. Even with her manipulative success that landed her a wealthy Frenchman and her rigid adherence to cultural expectations, she still has problems with social circulation. In fact, her pretentious attitudes and sneers about English women travelling across town alone appear as ludicrous and silly. Through Madame Duval’s character, we see Burney’s disapproving eyes cast not only toward social affectation, but also on women’s supposed dependence upon men.

In Burney’s world, when women face a personal crisis or health issues, they are not sequestered in the parlor or drawing room. Instead, their independent means
of travel provides them a way to help them deal with problems and cope with disappointments. The ability to travel about England at will gives her female characters an unusual advantage to maneuver without restraint in fashionable society. Disappointed in love with her radical marriage proposal to Albert Harleigh, *The Wanderer’s* Elinor hires a chaise to transport her from London to the seaside town, Portsmouth. From there she sails to the Isle of Wight, and eventually hires another chaise to take her to Brighthelmstone, a fashionable seaside resort made popular because of its fashionable shops. After her second rejection from Harleigh, she travels by chaise and four horses. Because of the four horses, this means was the swiftest, but most expensive way to travel. The emphasis here is on the public visibility of the four horses that announced to society the importance and financial abilities of the traveler. With Harleigh’s final rebuff, Elinor once again leaves and decides to continue travelling around England. Elinor’s private income and single state give her the freedom to travel when and where she wants to go. The ways in which she travels at her own discretion embodies her rejection of the feminine ideal that teaches confinement in the domestic domain.

For Camilla, travelling with independent women launches her into a circuit of spas and seaside resorts. With Mrs. Arlbery, Camilla travels to Southampton, with Mrs. Berlinton, she visits Tunbridge Wells, and with Lady Isabella, she journeys to Winchester. Not only do her travels enlarge Camilla’s circle of acquaintance, but they also provide her with an opportunity to learn to maneuver in fashionable society. Once she leaves her parsonage home, her life consists of participating in the social world. In each of Burney’s novels, women are at liberty to
travel to seaside resorts or spas when the notion strikes them, to go on country outings and visit estates and other scenic vistas, and to participate in fashionable amusements, such as pleasure gardens, balls, and public breakfasts.

But for Evelina, when she faces health problems, it is Mrs. Selwyn, a widowed lady with a large fortune, who carries Evelina in her own carriage to Bristol Wells to recuperate. While staying there, Mrs. Selwyn insists on travelling another short distance to confront the wealthy Sir John Belmont her estranged father, about his failure to acknowledge his orphaned daughter. Because Mrs. Selwyn has access to independent travel, they succeed in dealing with him face-to-face, and after several trips, they finally obtain his acknowledgement. It is Burney’s female characters who travel independently of any male attendants or male authority that emanate a sense of empowerment as they trek around the English countryside in post chaise style or in fashionable carriages. It is these empowered women that deal with and find alternative solutions to the social issues and problems of eighteenth-century women. In this way, Burney associates female mobility with independent thinking and well-being.

Mobility becomes a crucial marker for social status in Burney’s novels as in her culture. Since eighteenth-century women were not solely invested in landed estate or family title, Burney’s representation of women travelling in stylish carriages maps social status onto social and public places and provides a means for women to gain social leverage. Rather than belonging exclusively to men of titled families, we see how travelling in fashionable carriages offers pleasure and gratification to both genders. That seeing and being seen travelling in stylish
carriages emerge as a key components in creating social status reveals the scopophilic underpinning of mobility. Female mobility and circulation not only disrupts the containment of rank embedded in aristocratic privilege, but also breaks the confinement of eighteenth-century femininity. Such mobility reveals Burney’s recognition that the meaning of social status and femininity is unstable and constantly shifting during her lifetime.

Burney’s works celebrate the female traveler whose excursions allow her to participate in fashionable amusements inside and outside of London. Through the detailed descriptions we see carriages acting as fashionable accessories that make public statement about women’s social status as they travel in and out of London. In the eighteenth century, Georgian society is impelled to move in fashionable circles, and travelling describes the commonplace practice of fashionable circulation. While Burney betrays a number of anxieties about ambulating fashionable society, her novels promote female mobility as both advantageous and instructive. In this way, Burney discredits the ideological assumptions linking femininity with domestic confinement. Instead, Burney’s travelling women gain agency through fashion’s social power.

Notes


3 According to William Felton’s estimation, a yearly income of at least £800 needed to maintain one family carriage.

5 According to Underhill, each servant must be equipped with “one silk hat; one felt storm hat, or second hat dressed for purpose; one Derby; one suit of stable clothes, made either of whipcord or tweed; one sleeved waistcoat; one heavy cover coat; one stable cap, one mackintosh (or an upper Benjamin); one dozen collars; one dozen neckcloths; one livery body coat; one stripped valencia waistcoat (with sleeves); one livery great coat; one pair of trousers to match same (for occasional use in the morning or at night); one pair of leather (or cloth breeches); one pair top boots, with trees for same; one pair dogskin gloves; one pair heavy wool-lined gloves; one pair woolen gloves; one pair breeches trees” (86). This list gives a glimpse of how the servants were expected to dress, but it also indicates the money required to support such a staff. In addition to this list, Underhill provides guidelines for the provisions for each horse.

6 I am indebted to David Conner, the curator for Tyrwhitt-Drake Carriage Museum in Maidstone, UK. I had the pleasure of visiting this impressive collection of carriages and had the great opportunity to glean for his vast knowledge of carriages. He pointed out that coachmen never removed their gloves. Because of the harsh weather conditions that they were exposed to, coachmen suffered from crippling arthritis and broken bones. But in order to keep their employment, they attempted to keep their deteriorating hands hidden.

7 This model is still very popular for weddings and ceremonial pomp in England.

8 But as manufactures met the demand for lower styles for women, this created an awkward situation for ladies; it put them face to face with the rear-end of the horse. As a result, a high dashboard was added to prevent this unwanted view. As Walrond points out, “the curving dashboard was so designed that it obliterated the horses’ quarters from view to save the lady any embarrassment” (40).

9 As Walrond points out, “the use of the Curicle bar makes it essential that the horses should be of exactly the same height. They must match for stride and way of going. Ideally they should be of comparative colour. For these reasons, horsing a Curicle was, and still is, an expensive business” (98).

10 According to Felton, the curricle was a “superior kind of two-wheeled carriage, and from their novelty, and being generally used by persons of eminence…preferred as a more genteel kind of carriage” (95).

11 See introduction for Burney’s personal attitudes toward marriage. Despite family and social pressures and proposals of marriage, Burney did not marry until she was forty-one.

12 Hannah More agrees with Gregory, but offers her own assessment of too much travelling: “This inability of staying at home, as it is one of the most fallible, so it is one of the most dangerous symptoms of the reigning mania. It would be more tolerable, did this epidemic malady only break out, as formerly, during the winter, or some other season” (145). More sees women’s “inability of staying at home” as a sign of idleness and admonishes women to refrain from fashionable travel.
It is this Love of Company, more than the Diversions mentioned in the Bills, that makes our Ladies run galloping in Troops every Evening to Masquerades, Balls and Assemblies in Winter, and in the Summer to Vaux-hall, Ranelagh, Cuper’s-Gardens, Mary le Bon, Sadler’s-Wells, both old and new, Goodman’s-Fields, and twenty other such like Places…On the whole, therefore, Vanity, and the Desire of Admiration, are the chief Motives which induce our very young Ladies to these continual Ramble (57, 64). Eliza Haywood, The Female Spectator Book IV and Book V (1744-46)

As Eliza Haywood indicates here in her popular periodical The Female Spectator, women spending their newly acquired leisure time in pleasure gardens, spa resorts, and assembly rooms in London and surrounding areas raised cultural anxieties. Yet it is neither the diversion of the garden itself nor the entertainments provided there that concern Haywood, but rather the pursuit of admiration and the pleasure found in the company of people who are present at these establishments. So much so that the desire for admiration actually induces or motivates these young women to, as Haywood puts it, “run galloping in Troops every evening” (57). The preoccupation with places such as Vauxhall, Ranelagh, Pantheon, Tunbridge Wells, Maryleborne, Bristol Wells, Bath, and Brighton abounds throughout Burney’s fictional works and indicates the significance and prominence of leisurely amusements in Georgian fashionable society. The development and widespread popularity of pleasure entertainments seem to emerge in conjunction with Burney’s women who find self-gratification in being admired and who enjoy attending public amusements.
Haywood’s remark about young ladies seeing and being seen at these fashionable amusements, in fact, emphasizes the same awareness that is present in Burney’s works about the visibility and participation of women in public places. For instance, in *Evelina*, the Branghtons, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Brown question whether or not Evelina has visited such amusements while staying in London. They quiz her about locations such as Hampstead, Chelsea, Sadler’s Wells, Vauxhall and Marylebone, while arguing among themselves which of these places is more popular among “genteel people” (187). But when she responds that she has not attended such places, they are appalled and insist that unless she visits these places she has “seen nothing!” (187). Referring to this interrogation as a *catechism*, Burney suggests that this query, similar to a religious catechism, is intended to test and to confirm Evelina’s knowledge of fashionable places and to confirm her participation in the amusements. Such dismay over the lack of Evelina’s activities stresses how seeing and being seen in these fashionable places were a crucial component of an eighteenth-century woman’s life, and it calls attention to the interaction between scopophilia and spectacle in these public amusements.

Not only do fashionable amusements appear to be an element for Burney in the social construction of femininity, but they also function as a place to work out social relations. While Gillian Russell argues that these entertainments practiced strict exclusive membership of an elite crowd, the fact that the afore-mentioned groups, who are from diverse social classes, participate in these fashionable pleasures suggests that these entertainments appealed to and were available to a wide range of people. In fact, Burney shows us how these places of amusement
became a place where class lines became blurred and rank was shelved in pursuit of pleasure. Just as Haywood does not specify that the ladies who attend are from a particular class, Burney’s women who participate in these fashionable places and find admiration are from diverse classes.

For instance, when Evelina finally visits the Pantheon, she finds the same kind of admiration that Haywood warns about. As Mrs. Mirvan’s group of fashionable friends are drinking tea, they are discussing the popular fashions and the variety of diversions that they like to attend. Lord Merton admits he attends to see beautiful women and that he would give half of what he is worth “for a sight of only one.” He questions: “how can money be better employed than in the service of fine women?” (107). In other words, seeing the fashionable beauties in these pleasure amusements is worth the cost of the entrance fee. Mr. Lovel concurs and confesses that the main reason he attends these public amusements is to admire the women. As she is departing the Pantheon for Ranelagh, Lord Merton’s eye happens to catch a glimpse of the newly fashionably dressed Evelina. He rushes to her side, kneels, takes her hand, and makes “fine speeches and compliments” (108). With the adoration she receives, Evelina imagines herself as a goddess and him as a pagan. Despite all the other fashionable London ladies that are gathered at the Pantheon, Evelina is the one who receives the admiration of the male spectators.

Pleasure resorts, as represented in Burney’s works as balls, dances, spas, and pleasure gardens, bring together the public nature of fashion and femininity, and it is in these places of amusement that we witness the culmination of the process of fashion. In the preceding chapters, we have followed the process of a young woman
transforming into a lady of fashion. Through the scopophilic interests entrenched in shopping, Burney’s women learn to select proper apparel, and in dressing in fashionable attire, women from across all classes emerge out of the dressing room in the fine appearance of a lady of fashion. By travelling in elegant carriages, these fashionable ladies circulate throughout society in style and create a significant social status for themselves. But it is here through the prominent venues of the pleasure resorts that women as spectacles of fashion not only find autonomy, but they become empowered and dominate the social realm.

While other forms of public entertainment, such as coffee houses, previously excluded women, women dominated these new venues of entertainment by conspicuously becoming the focal point of attention. Seeing and being seen promenading in fashionable attire and socializing among other fashionable people became a crucial means for social networking, a place where social relations as well as gender relationships could be negotiated. These spaces of entertainment highlight women sporting the latest fashions and place them in the spotlight with all spectators’ eyes on their fashionable attire. Such attention to these specific types of social interests underscores the eighteenth century’s fascination with “seeing” and “being seen.” From the fashionable assemblies in Ranelagh’s great rotunda to the shady avenues and vistas of Vauxhall, the visibility of Burney’s fashionable women operates as a prominent feature for creating pleasure and amusement in public diversions.

Yet another important aspect of the pleasure gardens is the juxtaposition of natural pastoral scenery with elaborate architectural structures and ornamental
decorations. Such visual depictions of the natural landscape alongside the artificially constructed décor parallel how a woman also becomes culturally constructed and objectified as a spectacle of art as her presence accents the walkways and dance arenas. The design and construction of the garden pathways and dance areas create an atmosphere ideal for spectators to look upon objects of desire. From their desire for admiration, women present themselves as desirable spectacles; but by holding the attention of male spectators, they gain a sense of empowerment as they become the main attraction and dominate the gaze of their male spectators. While the gaze is typically gendered as an active male role and the object of the gaze as passive female, the role of spectator becomes subordinated to the power that resides in these objects of fashion. Just as other objects of fashion create desire and hold power over the consumer, Burney’s female characters hold power over their male spectators. Instead of passive objects, Burney’s women become active participants through their ability to direct and control the male spectator’s actions and attention.

To understand the significance of scenes set in such venues, it is important to understand the principal role of women in the emergence of these pleasure amusements and in the leisure industry in the midst of the fashion-driven culture of the eighteenth century. While considering the development of a few of the most prominent and popular places—Vauxhall, Marylebone, Ranelagh, Pantheon, and the Assembly Rooms at Bath—it is important to pinpoint how women’s leading positions in the pleasure resorts overlap with Burney’s women who also take prominent roles in their participation and are key features in these fashionable
places. These public amusements figure prominently in the lives of Burney’s female characters and are ideal sites to showcase her newly empowered fashionable ladies.

Marketing Female Presence in Vauxhall and Bath

Despite the presence of a few public gardens in the seventeenth century, the 1660 Restoration of Charles II instigated the growth of public gardens to provide leisurely amusements. In response to the budding interests of fashionable society, along with the influences of the French Court on Charles II, England ventured into opening its first pleasure garden, the New Spring Garden at Vauxhall in 1661. Both Seventeenth-century diarists John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys, both describe the outlay of the gardens and the spectacular events they attended.¹ According to W.S. Scott, “the earliest mention of them in any contemporary account is that given by Evelyn in his diary for July 2 of that year, where he notes that he paid a visit to the “new Spring Gardens at Lambeth, a pretty-contrived plantation” (18). This early garden not only served as the nucleus of the famous pleasure resort, Vauxhall, that was to follow, but it also provided a model for future public amusements. As a matter of fact, London and its surrounding urban areas featured more than two hundred pleasure resorts of various types.²

Throughout the eighteenth century, Vauxhall’s owner, Jonathan Tyers, a shrewd businessman with a deep understanding of advertising techniques, transformed and reshaped the garden to make it more attractive for its paying visitors, especially women. To appeal to the ladies of fashion and to make it appear as an amusement for them, he hired women to dress in fashionable attire and walk through town and engage in conversations loud enough to be overheard about plans
to attend Vauxhall. In 1728, Tyers purchased a lease to add twelve additional acres. By 1732 he decided to take innovative measures to increase the garden’s popularity and to entice more fashionable visitors. Taking William Hogarth’s advice, Tyers devised a spectacular re-opening that included a *ridotto al fresco*, outdoor musical entertainment.

Figure 40. Orchestra with the supper boxes in Vauxhall.

Adding musical entertainment and paintings to this serene sylvan setting and charging one guinea per person for admission transformed this simple garden with its country-style ale house into one of the most popular and most fashionable eighteenth-century amusements. Throughout the years of his ownership, Tyer continued to renovate and to make additions that attracted a broader spectrum of society. The installation of an organ, a raised orchestra building that was rebuilt in “Moorish” Gothic style in honor of Fredrick Prince of Wales, the erection of a life-
size statue of George Fredrick Handel, paintings for the decoration of the supper boxes, the erection of the rotunda or the “umbrella room,” and the introduction of vocal music are merely a few of the changes that occurred over the next decades (Figure 40).

Initially, Tyers wanted Vauxhall to be a socially exclusive place. With the first ridotto al fresco in 1732, Tyers took precautionary measures to secure the grounds by stationing approximately one hundred soldiers at the Vauxhall entrances and along the avenues for its four hundred attendees. The one guinea admission fee, a huge sum in eighteenth-century terms, limited access to only the wealthiest patrons. Finding success, but wanting to expand the scope of his visitors and especially his profit, Tyers later reduced the admission to one shilling, which as Warwick Wroth points out, became “the regular charge till 1792” (290). The 1738 season attendance soared, recording the sale of at least one thousand one shilling tickets. The one shilling admission fee meant that anyone who could afford the ticket could attend and mingle with royalty, aristocrats, wealthy landowners, merchants, and even prostitutes. Yet in addition to this fee, fashionable patrons could purchase distinctive silver or bronze medallions for one guinea that permitted admittance for a summer season. But by mid-century, the charge for a season ticket had increased to two pounds.

In addition to the price of admission, visitors were charged an exorbitant cost for food and drinks. One chief complaint among attendees was the diminutive portions of refreshments, especially the sliced ham reported to be so thin that a
newspaper could be read through a single slice. Burney’s Evelina describes partaking of such a meal in one of the strategically placed supper boxes:

About ten o’clock, Mr. Smith having chosen a box in a very conspicuous place, we all went to supper. Much fault was found with every thing that was ordered, though not a morsel of any thing was left; and the dearness of the provisions, with conjectures upon what profit was made by them, supplied discourse during the whole meal.

(194)

Figure 41. Grand Walk surrounded by the supper boxes.

Through Evelina’s account of the scarcity of refreshments, we also learn that this is not Mr. Smith’s first visit to Vauxhall. Aware of the importance of location, he chooses a supper box from which he and his company will receive the most
attention and have the best view of the fashionable procession. These supper boxes served a twofold purpose: a place for spectators to sit, eat, and to watch, and for fashionable society to watch women parading around (Figure 41). It is apparent that Mr. Smith is not attending Vauxhall for its delicious cuisine; in fact, despite the high costs of a meager, insufficient meal, Mr. Smith chooses to visit Vauxhall so that he can see the entourage of fashionable women. Here in Vauxhall, we can see that whether it is Tyer hiring ladies to dress in stylish attire or visitors sitting in the supper boxes to watch the promenading women, fashionable ladies are instrumental in the early development of pleasure gardens.

In addition to women’s presence that was instrumental in the promotion of pleasure gardens, female visibility also played an important role in making spa resorts and seaside excursions fashionable places to visit. One such place that figures prominently in Burney’s fiction is the spa town of Bath. While Bath’s first assembly room opened in 1708, Bath’s spa history dates from the Roman times. From the early days of the Roman occupation, the natural springs provided an ideal place to construct the sacred baths. But after the glory days of the Roman Empire and Rome withdrew from England, the site fell into derelict and silted over. Using the same stone the Romans had used, the baths were reworked in 1090 and used for medicinal purposes. Throughout the middle ages, the baths became one of the great European centers of healing. Suppressed during Henry VIII’s reign because of its association with Catholic sympathizers and recusant plots, the bath witnessed its revival when Queen Elizabeth visited in 1574 and stamped her seal of approval on them. Her visit not only produced an economic stimulation, but also created a
clamor among the fashionable aristocracy. The Queen’s interest placed Bath, as it was now called, on the map as a fashionable spa not only to “take the waters,” but to indulge in social recreation.

Following in the footsteps of Elizabeth, Queen Anne of Denmark’s 1613 visit, without her husband James I, continued the female royalty’s participation. According to Phyllis Hembry, “She was the first English royal to adopt the new practice of public bathing” (39). Before her death in 1619, Queen Anne’s return visits to take of the bath waters increased the popularity of public bathing. However, with her 1625 arrival in England to marry Charles I, Princess Henrietta turned the attention briefly away from Bath to a new spa, Tunbridge Wells. Her stay certainly focused the spotlight at Bath when she produced the necessary heir, Charles II after her stay. Because of its close proximity to London, it provided a nice diversion from the summer heat of the city. But Bath found favor with Charles II when it was the first city to declare him king in 1660, and his wife, Queen Henrietta Maria, was responsible for reinstating the vogue for taking the waters at Bath during the Restoration. Although the last of the reigning monarchs to visit, Queen Anne’s four visits to Bath helped to sustain its dominance among English spas. From the first female sovereign’s visit in 1574 to Queen Anne’s, the public visibility of these prestigious women induced the beau monde to include spa culture in their fashionable pursuits.

From the Elizabethan years to the Stuart era, the aristocracy and the middling classes took notice of the royalty’s interest, so each queen’s visit sparked interest and added to the growing popularity of visiting Bath for the emerging beau monde.
Despite the new fascination with Tunbridge Wells and other emerging spa towns, such as Harrogate, Epsom, and Wellingborough, Bath held its own as the principal spa resort and as a rival for London’s fashionable society. David Wheeler argues that as “the eighteenth century witnesses the birth of the leisure industry, and Bath, no doubt because of its medical reputation, became its Mecca” (121). He goes on to say, “in the late eighteenth century, Bath ranked second in fashion only to London” (122). By this time, Bath was well on its way to transforming itself into a tourist town, and this social “Mecca” took center stage with women supplying the foundation that made taking the waters a favorite leisure time activity of eighteenth-century society.

*Female Entrepreneurs in Marylebone*

Whereas Vauxhall was celebrated for its female beauties among its elaborate architecture and famous for expensive, but skimpy meals, Marylebone Gardens became renowned for its delicacies created by a female chef and by the dominance of female entertainment. Similar to Vauxhall’s origins, Marylebone Gardens started in 1650 as a small garden with a tavern and circular walk. But in 1738, Daniel Gough recognized its financial potential and opened it as a public amusement, charging an admission fee like that of Vauxhall. Through the acquisition of surrounding land, the garden eventually expanded across eight acres. Thousands of trees with added illuminations were planted along newly constructed pathways to mimic the atmosphere of Vauxhall. An Orchestra and the Burletta Theatre framed the outer skirts of the Grand Walk. The main entertainment consisted of a garden orchestra, and a Grand Room was built for balls and suppers. But in 1756 John
Trusler acquired Marylebone Gardens, and he found an innovative way to attract and entertain guests. Miss Trusler, John’s daughter, took control of the food services as the executive chef. 

While the gardens cancelled musical entertainments during the winter months, Miss Trusler’s sideboard treats and fresh mince pies provided a source of entertainment and income. In 1760 Miss Trusler expanded her menu and offered catering services in homes. One such advertisement appears in the *Public Advertiser* (6 May 1760):

> Miss Trusler begs Leave to inform the Nobility and Gentry that she intends to make Fruit Tarts during the Fruit Season; and hopes to give
equal Satisfaction as with the rich Cakes and Almond Cheese-cakes. The Fruit will always be fresh-gathered, having great Quantities in the Garden, and none but Loaf Sugar used and the finest Epping Butter. Tarts of a twelvepenny Size will be made every Day from One to Three O’Clock; and those who want them of larger Size to fill a Dish are desired to speak for them, and send their Dish or the Size of it, and the Cake shall be made to fit. The Almond Cheese-cakes will be always hot at One o’clock as usual, and the rich Seed and Plum Cakes sent to any Part of Town at 2s6d each.

The quality and the assortment of Miss Trusler’s gourmet refreshments enabled Marylebone to be distinguished from other gardens serving skimpy meals like Vauxhall, or just tea, butter, and bread like Ranelagh. In this way, Miss Trusler’s innovative cookery was responsible for making Marylebone a fashionable gathering place.

When Thomas Lowe purchased the gardens in 1763, Miss Trusler took her pastry delights with her and started a home catering service. Yet Lowe introduced another interesting feature that set Marylebone apart from the other gardens. While other gardens did employ female solo singers, Lowe decided to showcase women in his musical entertainments. He recruited six female singers and featured the beautiful eighteen-year-old, Miss Ann Catley. Placing these women in the limelight proved to be a successful plan. On the opening night of the summer season, these women sang “A New Musical Address to the Town.” The lyrics of this song promised that the musical entertainments and refreshments would make up for the
absence of the impressive architecture of Vauxhall or the grand Rotunda at Ranelagh. Miss Catley sang: “Though here no Rotunda expands its wide Dome / No Canal on its Borders invites ye to roam / Yet Nature some Blessings has scattered around / And means to improve may hereafter be found…Good music, Good wine with each other shall vie.” Catley’s reference to the blessings that Nature has scattered around not only refers to the food and drink available, but also alludes to the musical entertainment provided by the unusual host of female singers (Figure 42). The 1770s saw the addition of fireworks under the famous pyrotechnist Morel Torré. Evelina describes seeing these impressive, yet frightening fireworks:

The firework was really beautiful, and told, with wonderful ingenuity, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice: but at the moment of the fatal look, which separated them forever, there was such an explosion of fire, and so horrible a noise, that we all, as of one accord, jumpt hastily from the form, and ran away some paces, fearing that we were in danger of mischief, from the innumerable sparks of fire which glittered in the air. (232)

In spite of the spectacular fireworks, the gardens, as Evelina describes them, are not impressive: “This Garden, as it is called, is neither striking for magnificence nor for beauty” (232). The end of Marylebone was fast approaching and in 1775 no concerts or fireworks appeared and by 1776 the Gardens closed. Interestingly, Evelina was published in 1778, a year after Marylebone closed. Burney visited Marylebone in 1773 and witnessed them, perhaps, as they were entering a stage of decline.10
While Burney gives us a glimpse of the gardens and fireworks, the primary focus of the Marylebone scene is Evelina’s escapades with women from differing social classes. During the firework chaos, Evelina becomes separated from her party and encounters several men who attempt to seduce her. Barely escaping the throes of a young officer, Evelina seeks protection from two “dear ladies.” It is only through their behavior, their passing remarks, and their reaction to her flight from physical harm that she detects she has made a mistake. Instead of seeking assistance from “ladies,” Evelina surprisingly solicits help from two prostitutes. In this instance, this case of mistaken identity can be explained in how these women appear, that is, they are dressed in fashionable attire and are present in a fashionable place. Their appearance is so deceptive and convincing that even after Evelina discovers her error Madame Duval still seems impressed with the women and believes them to be “two real fine ladies” (236).

Burney shows us here that women of all classes and social positions who could pay the entrance fee visited the gardens and were, in fact, prominent features of the garden. Moreover, Burney’s array of female characters in this episode illustrates that women’s fashionable attire made it difficult to determine a woman’s social position based on physical appearance alone. Because of their fashionable appearance, prostitutes mingle freely throughout the garden with women of all social positions. As Julia Epstein argues, “[the prostitutes] are among the novel’s key portraits of autonomous women, and they are characterized by their ability to circulate freely, to choose their own company, and to define themselves for themselves” (203). She goes on to point out that Burney neither idealizes nor
condemns this deviation from eighteenth-century social norms for women. While I agree with Epstein’s observation that Burney neither endorses nor denounces these prostitutes, Burney’s placement of prostitutes in Marylebone, a place famous for female catering and entertainment, underscores how women of limited means rise to a place of prominence and profit from the opportunities afforded to them through pleasure gardens. What remains implicit is the primary source of a prostitute’s income, that is, the men who pay for sex and the quantity of clientele available at the pleasure resorts. As a resource for female employment and income, Burney’s Marylebone addresses anxieties about indistinguishable social positions and proper feminine behavior that emerge from the public visibility of working women.

Female Liberation and Dominance in Ranelagh

Another such venue for blurring class distinctions and for granting feminine license was witnessed at masquerades held at Vauxhall’s primary rival, Ranelagh Gardens. With the owners wanting to present their venture as a more fashionable place, they not only increased the entrance fee to two shillings and sixpence, more than double of Vauxhall’s one shilling, but they added a unique diversion, the masquerade. First called an amphitheatre because of the layout of its balconies and supper boxes that over looked the circular arena, the Rotunda with its impressive architecture presented a stunning atmosphere (Figure 44). The Rotunda offered refreshments of tea, coffee, bread and butter, orchestral concerts, and the enclosed space offered protection from inclement weather. The convenience of candle light chandeliers and warmth from its centerpiece fireplace provided an additional benefit. Between the musical presentations, the surrounding garden provided
additional opportunities for pleasures. Visitors ventured outside to walk among the
garden’s illuminated elms, garden-orchestra, Chinese Pavilion, and ornamental lake,
and by 1767 stunning fireworks became a prominent feature (Figure 43).

![Figure 43. Chinese Pavilion in Ranelagh Gardens.](image)

In Tobias Smollet’s *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*, Lydia’s letter to Willis
gives us a grand description of Ranelagh.

> Ranelagh looks like the enchanted palace of a genie, adorned with the
> most exquisite performances of painting, carving, and gilding,
> enlightened with a thousand golden lamps, that emulate the noonday
> sun; crowded with the great, the rich, the gay, the happy, and the fair;
glittering with cloth of gold and silver, lace, embroidery, and precious stones. While these exulting sons and daughters of felicity tread this round of pleasure, or regale in different parties, with fine imperial tea and other delicious refreshments, their ears entertained with the most ravishing delights of music, both instrumental and vocal. (92)

Figure 44. The Rotunda in Ranelagh Gardens.

Perhaps the most popular diversion offered at Ranelagh was the introduction of the masquerade (Figure 45). Ranelagh’s Rotunda transformed this former exclusive aristocratic amusement into a popular form of public entertainment that included a broader spectrum of society, and the disguising costumes gave women a sense of freedom that enabled them to challenge socially expected feminine behavior.
Burney witnessed first-hand the liberating and empowering experience of attending a masquerade. In the 10 January 1770 account of her preparation for and participation in a masquerade, seventeen-year-old Burney acknowledges the freedom she feels under the protection of this social event. She refuses to dress in anything, such as a Quaker outfit or a nun’s attire, that would require “gravity and extreme reserve required to support them, which would have made me necessarily dull & stupid that I could not have met with much entertainment” (Chisholm 30). As a result of her choice of fanciful dress, she draws the attention of “a harlequin, merlin, a witch, two or three Turks, a pink domino, and a Dutchman” (Chisholm 31). Her keen eye for observation and detailed descriptions provides a glimpse into her response to deceptive appearances:

Nothing could be more droll…to see the pleasure which appeared in some Countenances, & the disappointment pictured in others…in short every Face appeared different from what we expected. The old Witch in particular we found was a young Officer; the Punch who had made himself as Broad as long, was a very young and handsome man; but what surprised me, was the shepherd, whose own face was so stupid that we could scarcely tell whether he had taken off his mask or not. (Chisholm 31)

Here we see Burney’s own surprise in how costumed appearances can certainly be deceiving. As she describes her fascination with these characters, we learn that Burney captivates the Dutchman’s attention. So much so, that a few days after the masquerade he sends a ticket to her for a different assembly. Throughout this seven-
page account of her personal experience, Burney reveals how hidden anatomical differences and obscured social lines grant freedom of action that is in opposition to cultural expectations. The concealing costume permitted expression and liberation of what one would like to be, and in some cases, an inversion of the person’s gender and social position. This public amusement violated social rules and decorum, a practice which allowed respectable women to approach and to speak freely with unknown men while keeping their identity a secret. As Terry Castle points out in her groundbreaking study of the eighteenth-century masquerade, “Since participants typically adopted the costumes of beings whose natures were antithetical to their own—of a different culture, sex, or sphere of existence—one could conclude that individual masqueraders were acting out repressed fantasies of alterity, symbolically embracing otherness” (905). In her discussion of a masquerade recorded in the *Guardian*, Castle explains that “women changed into men, and men into women, children in leading-strings, seven-foot high, courtiers transformed into clowns, ladies of the night into saints, people of the first quality into beasts or birds, gods, or goddesses” (6). For this reason, the masquerade is viewed as a public activity that inverts social order, creating an atmosphere of carnivalization and topsy-turvydom. This upside-down world introduced an instability of the status quo that threatened established social mores, which in turn, provoked a cacophony of criticism. Despite the sounds of alarm about moral decay and social corruption, the masquerade appeared irrepressible and flourished throughout the eighteenth century. The masquerade’s costumed crowd provided a visual spectacle that embodied the inversion of encoded male-female power relations.
Burney uses such an event in *Cecilia* to equip her heroine with an exceptional ability to captivate her male pursuers. In an interesting but unusual stroke of her pen, Burney disregards the typical masquerade costume and dresses Cecilia in an unconventional plain dress. As Amanda Vickery points out, “By the rules of the masquerade, absolute anonymity had to be respected and introductions were dispensed with” (243). Yet instead of clothing her in deceptive attire, she appears without costume or mask as “the only female in a common dress” amidst “the variety of dress, the medley of characters, the quick succession of figures, and the ludicrous mixture of groups” (106). Not only does this common dress reveal her identity and gender, but it also makes her more conspicuous as a visual spectacle. Dependent neither on distortion nor deception, Cecilia gains an empowering
position in her common dress as she becomes the center of attention. In becoming the “object of general attention,” the power of the gaze becomes inverted, investing power in Cecilia, the object of attention.

Cecilia’s ability to captivate male admirers to the point that she controls their movement emphasizes Crary’s theory of how power becomes invested in an object of attention. As she moves from room to room, men constantly follow and surround her. At one point, the white domino, a male admirer, tells her that her face is responsible for the “captivity of thousands” (112). Disguised as Don Quixote, Mr. Belfield “kissed his spear in token of allegiance, and then slowly dropping upon one knee, … bending down his head, he kissed the floor” where Cecilia sits (108). Mr. Gosport, dressed as a school-master, pledges to cast his rod at her feet, “this emblem of my authority! and to forget, in the softness of your conversation all the roughness of discipline” (114). With their symbols of forced strength and power and masculine sexuality now in positions of submission and loyalty, it appears that without a disguise Cecilia possesses the capacity to transform masculine power and, in an inversion of power, men bow at her feet. It is at this masquerade that Cecilia eventually meets her future husband, a young aristocratic man who is dressed as a domino, and she obtains lasting powers of sexual control over him.

As seen in this advertisement in the General Evening Post (8 March 1753), women attending Ranelagh’s masquerades became a main attraction that captivated men and enticed them to attend. As a result, one such man places this advertisement in the in an attempt to locate his vanquisher:
This is to inform the Lady that was in a wite mask, red Beard and Ey’s at the last Masquerade but one, in a brown and silver flora Peteccoat and head-dress, remarkable gentle, very finely maid, who lost her companyd with severall masks, particular with one, who in rapturous heared her declare a dislike to gameing and the intention of Maskquerades...on which he asked, wathere single or engaged, and under whos care that Night?

This captivate man goes on to explain how he continually goes to Ranelagh in hopes of finding the masked lady again, and he expresses his disappointment about not seeing her at other masquerades. Similar to Cecilia’s control over her male admirers, this man’s actions become controlled by this masked lady.

Burney not only inverts conventional authority and endows Cecila with an empowering role, but her masquerade scene also disrupts the boundaries of traditional class relationships. In fact, the masquerade with its costumed individuals calls attention to fashion’s power to blur class distinctions. With costumes and masks providing a way for characters to cross class lines, lower orders consort with the upper classes. Mr. Briggs, Cecilia’s penny-pinching guardian, creates a commotion and arouses suspicion when he dresses as a chimneysweeper and attends uninvited. Even though Briggs has accumulated substantial wealth, members of the upper class do not accept him into their social circles. One reason they choose not to associate with him is because he lives as a miser, not as a participant of fashionable society. Therefore, when he crashes the masquerade, he dresses in the cheapest way possible. As Castle notes, uninvited parties from lower classes often attended
masquerades, thereby permitting them to mingle with members of the upper classes. Briggs’ niggardly appearance creates anxiety among the guests: “I really believe there’s a common chimney-sweeper got in! I assure you its enough to frighten one to death, for every time he moves the soot smells so you can’t think; quite real soot” (110). By concealing his identity, he navigates freely among members of a social class that would ordinarily be off limits to him. Masquerades, such as this, that permitted the mingling of social classes and that highlighted women as spectacles of attention was one of the chief diversions that made Ranelagh so popular.

“Petticoat Government” in the Pantheon

By 1772, the stately Pantheon on Oxford Street opened to offer even more competition and opportunities for leisurely amusements (See Figure 1). This social venue arguably would not have taken place without the significant role women played not only as consumers of this entertainment, but also as financial investors. One of the primary figures responsible for instigating the development of this new venue was Margareta Maria Ellice, a wealthy single woman who socialized in fashionable circles. Promising to provide the financial support for such an undertaking, Ellice persuaded Philip Elias Turst in 1769 to construct an elaborate rotunda or dome similar to that of the mosque of Santa Sophia in Constantinople. With this ambitious undertaking, she hoped to provide a venue suitable for nobility that would serve as substitute entertainment for the winter season, as Ranelagh was only open in the summer season April to November. But when the costs of construction escalated, Ellice withdrew her financial support, leaving only her initial £10,000 investment. But Turst refused to abort the project and resorted to selling
shares to the builders and crafters, making them directly involved as shareholders and investors.

Wanting to promote the Oxford Street Pantheon as an exclusive social space, the Proprietors—ironically including the craftsmen and artisans—devised a ‘Plan’ to limit attendance to an elite audience. The idea was that no one could hold a subscription to the Pantheon without the invitation and endorsement of a peeress. A ticket, similar to a ladies calling card, acted as a membership card and admitted ladies into this fashionable circle. This gender-specific rule immediately created controversy. According to the Public Advertiser even members of the House of Lords were refused admission without the permission of their wives, and it declared that the Pantheon was under “Petticoat-Government” (13 December 1771). The Proprietors intensified this gender issue by advertising in the newspapers their intent to exclude ‘women of the town.’ However, this declaration was soon contested by Mr. Hanger, a rake, but a man of substantial financial means. He challenged the Proprietors and demanded that they physically defend this regulation, but after refusing to do so, Hanger defied their authority and entered with his mistress. To follow up his confrontation, the newspaper reported that in the future it would be futile to expect ladies to carry around with them papers declaring their “Birth, Rank, Fortune, Marriage, or unsullied Reputation.” Shortly after these incidents, arguments emerged regarding the role of peeresses in making decisions about membership, which eventually led to a new subscription arrangement that no longer mentioned peeresses. And as a result, the Pantheon became a melting-pot of social boundaries, just like its rivals.
The emphasis here on Ellice as a female proprietor of a public amusement and the female influence of peeresses able to either permit or deny access to social circles underscores the prominence of women in fashionable circles. But it also highlights another dimension of female agency made possible through the complex power structure of fashion and demonstrates how these fashionable venues opened up spaces and created extremely visible roles for women. So it was in the magnificent Vauxhall, Ranelagh, Marylebone, and the Pantheon that fashionable Georgian society sought pleasure night after night.

Walking the Circuit in Vauxhall

Despite the rivalry and diversity among these public establishments, when we look closer at the layout of these amusements, we can see striking similarities of a ritualized schedule and an ordered circuit that creates a methodical agenda among the pleasure resorts. Whether we explore the shady vistas of Vauxhall and Marylebone or the ostentatious rotundas of Ranelagh and the Pantheon, the key feature of all seems to be a circuit walk that inevitably brought one back to the original starting point along with a timetable for events. Whether a corridor, an arena, or a footpath, these artificially created pathways encouraged visitors to take a particular route, one that was to be walked in one direction only, thereby controlling the order in which visitors encountered various features and particular views. This imposed pathway seems evident in Burney’s *Evelina*, as she describes Vauxhall as a place of entertainment and delight, but she complains of the formality in the design of its walkways:
The Garden is very pretty, but too formal; I should have been better pleased, had it consisted less of strait walks...The trees, the numerous lights, and the company in the circle around the orchestra make a most brilliant and gay appearance; and, had I been with a party less disagreeable to me, I should have thought it a place formed for animation and pleasure. There was a concert, in the course of which, a hautbois concert was so charmingly played, that I could have thought myself upon enchanted ground, had I had spirits more gentle to associate with. (193)

Evelina’s assessment of the garden as “too formal…with strait walks” emphasizes the garden’s structured and planned walking circuit that predetermines how visitors experienced the garden and their surroundings (Figure 46). And Evelina’s discomfort with her present company, as opposed to the delight she experiences in the company of people she observes gathered around the orchestra, supports Haywood’s assertion that a young lady’s “love of company” forms a major aspect of the pleasure she derives from such public venues.

Sprinkled among these walkways are visual and sensory delights designed to arouse the sense of sight and sound. In doing so, artificially constructed works of art appear alongside a cultivated natural landscape. The entrance into Vauxhall conducted visitors into a rectangular shaped Grove that was framed by supper boxes placed in crescent-shaped pavilions. As they strolled along the Grand Walk—a path fashioned in a grid pattern with broad alleys crossing at right angles around the wooded borders—guests encountered a series of monuments, scenes, and vistas. The
viewer’s experience was carefully controlled with such means as benches and inscriptions that indicated special points of interest, which encouraged visitors to linger. Along the way, visitors encountered striking views, sculpture, and architectural ensembles that not only were strategically placed, but were also charged with complex meanings.

Figure 46. Walkways in Vauxhall.

For example, upon entering the central area of the Gardens—the Grove—the first object that would capture visitors’ attention was the grand life-size marble statue of Handel. What made this work of art extremely extraordinary was the fact that Handel was a man without rank or a noteworthy bloodline and still living. The position of the statue shows him relaxing in everyday dress, more specifically his gown and slippers and not wearing a wig. That Handel did not belong to the aristocracy and that he was not a statesman, yet is placed in a position of honor,
suggests that a man of common means could, in fact, elevate his position and respectability through his hard work.

As visitors continued their stroll, they passed alongside the Rural Downs on the east side of the garden and looked out into what appeared to be large open country fields, often filled with sheep or hay gatherers. This unobtrusive view was made possible through the means of an English ha-ha (Figure 47). The ha-ha was a sunken fence or a trench with one side using a vertical wall layered with stone or brick while the other has a sloping wall of dirt. These ha-has were sometimes fifty feet deep and acted as a means to keep cattle and sheep out of the estate’s formal gardens without obstructing the view or prospect with railing or fences. Also since the appearance gave the illusion of no barriers, the sheep and cattle were additional ornaments to the garden. While these boundaries were artificially constructed, they manipulated nature to make the panoramic view appear as natural. In the midst of this particular setting, guests encountered a statue of Milton in a seated position, which gave them the impression he was observing and listening to them. Even though this additional ornament was placed for aesthetic purposes, certainly one cannot help but think of the implications of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, especially since it is placed in the part of the garden near the deceptive ha-ha. This decorative object and the meanings attached to it draw attention to the underlying power embedded in an ornamental structure or a fashionable object. And it underscores Crary’s supposition in how a fashionable object can possess an empowering influence on the eye of the beholder.
And yet the ha-ha is not the only ornamental deception, nor is the statue of Milton the only object in the garden that demands attention. Evelina continues to describe her experience in the garden:

As we were walking about the orchestra, I heard a bell ring, and in a moment, Mr. Smith, flying up to me, caught my hand, and, with a motion too quick to be resisted, ran away with me many yards before I had breath to ask his meaning....we should run on, or we shall lose the cascade... He hurried me away, mixing with a crowd of people, all running with so much velocity, that I could not imagine what had raised such an alarm...The scene of the cascade I thought extremely pretty, and the general effect striking and lively...[Afterwards] they led me about the garden, purposely to enjoy my first sight of various other deceptions. (194)
As Evelina recounts here, at nine o’clock and with the ringing of a bell, Vauxhall guests made a mad dash from all over the Gardens to view the “cascade.” As visitors hurried to secure the best place for viewing, a curtain was drawn aside to disclose a painted landscape scene illuminated with concealed lights with a miller’s house and watermill in the foreground (Figure 48). The guests witnessed water flowing down the canvas that actually turned the watermill. This deception or captivating object seems to control the movement and attention of the crowd. Even though Mr. Smith and the others have witnessed this spectacle before, they are drawn to see it again and experience the pleasure that viewing it brings.

Figure 48. The Cascade in Vauxhall.
Domes of Pleasure

Similar to the contrived course and organized events experienced in Vauxhall, the Rotunda in Ranelagh Gardens provided the perfect atmosphere for circular motion (Figure 49). In Smollet’s *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker*, Matthew Bramble observes that “One half of the company are following one another’s tails, in an eternal circle; like so many blind asses in an olive-mill,” whereas Lydia describes the scene as “sons and daughters of felicity tread[ing] this round of pleasure” (89, 92). It is in this eternal circle or this ritualized round of pleasure that fashionable London revolved. Whether outdoors in the garden’s walkways or indoor on an inner circuit, promenading in fashionable attire to attract attention became the main feature of these public amusements. As Wroth points out, “the chief diversion was the promenade in the Rotunda. A guide-book of 1793 states that “walking round the Rotunda” was “one of the pleasures of the place” (204).
This circuit path not only gave the viewer a chance for multiple perspectives with comparative impressions, but it also provided opportunities for women to competitively display their fashionable attire and gain attention. The rustling sound of women’s dresses as they paraded around the room became a common feature.

![Figure 50. Promenading in the Rotunda in Ranelagh Gardens.](image)

Evelina’s account of Ranelagh tells of her sitting in the supper boxes as she watches fashionable society parade around the room (Figure 50). But once she is invited to participate in the promenading, she transforms from a spectator to a spectacle. It is in the elegant Rotunda where Evelina learns how to “take turns around the room” to display her stylish gown (62). In doing so, Evelina becomes a spectacle of fashion, an object that adds to the elegant décor to be looked upon and desired.

Similar to Vauxhall’s walkway and the Rotunda’s circle, the design of the Pantheon also suggests a calculated floorplan that would guide visitors on a specific course. Visitors entered through a covered portico from Oxford Street and
preceeded to their initial spectator viewing by passing through two card rooms before reaching the Grand Staircase that led to a rotunda. Instead of supper boxes like those that framed Ranelagh’s Rotunda, grand colonnades surrounded the enormous assembly room, creating overlooking galleries. After mingling with the fashionable company or observing from one of the bordering galleries, visitors were invited to take tea and supper in a room below the rotunda. In order to accommodate the guests, this supper room was as the same shape and size of the rotunda, but divided into five aisles. The extravagant architecture, the lavish décor, and the imposed passages provided an ideal backdrop to highlight and encircle fashionable women (Figure 51).
Mary Robinson’s *Memoirs* tells of her encountering two rakes who, “like sharks circling a kill,” pursue her relentlessly from the rotunda to the tea-room to the vestibule. Yet while she seems to portray herself as a reluctant participant, she recounts her induction into the *beau monde*. She transforms from a spectator of fashionable society into a spectacle through which she experiences moments of empowerment as she becomes the object of her male admirers attention. Similarly, in Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, as Belinda and Lady Delacour arrive at the Pantheon, Lady Delacour’s enthusiasm turns to attracting “universal admiration” with all the “ease, and grace, and gayety of Euphrosyne” (29). She explains to Belinda how such interest occurs:

> One begins with being charmed with the bustle and glare, and what the French call *spectacle*; this is over, I think, in six months. I can but just recollect having been amused at the Theatres, and the Opera, and the Pantheon, and Ranelagh, and all those places, for their own sakes. Soon, very soon we go out to see people, not things. (62)

Here Haywood’s assessment about young ladies “galloping in Troops” every evening for the “love of company” certainly seems born out in Lady Delacour’s explanation, as she makes it clear that she attends such places not for the diversion that it offers, but to see people and to obtain pleasure in captivating her male audience.

*Making the Rounds in Assembly Rooms at Spa Resorts*

While pleasure gardens embodied commercialized amusement in London, fashionable amusements extended outside of London also provided space to
showcase women wearing stylish apparel. As Burney demonstrates, the eighteenth century witnessed the heyday of spas from local mineral springs that provided opportunities for convenient day trips, such as Evelina enjoys with Mrs. Sewlyn and Camilla encounters with Mrs. Arlbery. Visitors usually participated in “taking the water” for medicinal purposes, but then enjoyed other amusements of breakfasting and music before returning home. However, when urban expansion and fast-growing cities converged with the demand for entertainment, the grandeur of traveling to exotic pleasure spas and seaside resorts emerged and began to supersede London’s popular pleasure gardens and day spas.

As improved roadways and new modes of transportation combined with an increased pressure to participate in other forms of fashionable amusements, Georgians indulged themselves in the greater spas outside London and the seaside resorts that surfaced along England’s seacoasts. Georgians left their homes for a season and took lodgings in residential places that were newly constructed to accommodate their arrival. By taking in the sea water or mineral water internally and externally, visitors hoped to improve their health ailments. In Burney’s journals, she tells of the many visits to Bath in which she accompanies Hester Thrale to take treatments for her health issues. In addition to these trips, she also details her husband’s visit after he received a near-fatal wound fighting with Napoleon. But the appeal of the health benefits of taking the waters was not sufficient to guarantee a continuing influx of new visitors or the consistent return of previous ones. Something was needed to attract and to maintain a steady flow of tourists. That something, as Burney shows us, was entertainment.
Amusements in these pleasure resorts shifted from vulgar diversions, such as cock-fighting, bull-baiting, and pig racing, to activities that were suitable for fashionable society. Even though London boasted of assembly rooms, the spa resorts surpassed them in popularity. So the main concern of these resort towns was to provide the same types of fashionable amusements and entertainments that their growing population of residents, tourists, and travelers were accustomed to in London. From private balls held in ladies’ drawing rooms to public dances conducted at newly constructed assembly rooms, indoor entertainments soared in popularity at spa and seaside resorts and provided opportunities for women to display themselves for admiration (Figure 52).

Figure 52. Assembly Rooms in Bath.
As the most popular source of indoor activity at the spa in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the assembly room provides as a social gathering for fashionable society and acts as a cohesive element that drew together under one roof the leading members of the community, as well as a diversified group of guests. While her most distinguished guests arrived by their private carriages, such as Mrs. Arlbery and Mrs. Berlinton, anyone who could afford the inexpensive price of a stage coach ticket could visit. Women like the fashionable Mrs. Arlbery usually brought along with them to the resort towns a retinue of servants for their convenience and of friends for their pleasure. Whether she travels to Tunbridge Wells or Southampton, Mrs. Arlbery always invites Camilla to go with her. Often servants or members of the lower classes dress in cast off clothing and sport the latest fashions and are seen circulating among the elite guests.

In one assembly room, Burney’s guest list shows us an expansive span of society. Along with the fashionable Mrs. Arlbery and the parson’s daughter, Camilla, Mr. Dubster, the travelling salesman of trinkets, pots, and pans, dresses in stylish new clothes and relentlessly pursues Camilla. Also gathered here are men of substantial financial resources, Major Cerwood, Lord O’Lerney, and Sir Sedley Clarendel. A Picturesque Guide to Bath provides an interesting description of the medley of guests similar to Burney’s:

No place in England, in a full season, affords so brilliant a circle of polite company as Bath. The young, the old, the grave, the gay, the infirm, and the healthy, all resort to this vortex of amusement. Ceremony beyond the essential rules of politeness is totally exploded;
every one mixes in the Rooms upon an equality; and the entertainments are so wisely regulated, that although there is never a cessation of them, neither is there a lassitude from bad hours, or from an excess of dissipation. (Ibbetson et al. 94)

For the most part, the assembly room crowd, as Burney indicates, was a hodgepodge of all social classes. As the Guide to Bath indicates and Burney shows, the inclusivity of these fashionable places also acted as a leveling device through which individuals mixed freely and on equal terms.

This large gathering of mixed classes created a unique social problem: how does one behave with no precedent to follow? At the Norwick assembly, Miss Margland, a governess who was previously a lady of fashion, complains about the lack of restrictions: “there’s a great want of regulation at balls, to prevent low people from asking who they will to dance with them” (71). To help alleviate problems, a governor or a master of ceremonies determined and supervised strict rules of etiquette, such as formal introductions of young women to gentlemen and when a young lady could refuse a dance partner. Miss Margland tries politely to explain this procedure to the “tinkler” Mr. Dubster when he keeps asking Camilla to dance. She asks, “You know, I suppose, sir, that no young lady of any consideration dances with a gentleman that is a stranger to her, without he’s brought to her by the master of ceremonies?”(70). According to the codes that regulate behavior, Camilla can refuse to dance with him because she has not received a proper introduction.

However, when she attends Tunbridge Wells and the master of ceremonies presents Sir Theophilus to her, Camilla refuses to dance with him. Because the
master of ceremonies introduces this gentleman to her, the rules of decorum state she cannot refuse him without making a social blunder. Similarly, Evelina has problems figuring out these same codes of social behavior in London’s assembly rooms and questions why young women are not given a book of instructions. For Burney’s young women, these rules of decorum that govern behavior for fashionable society create awkward situations and problems for them. In order to be part of fashionable society, however, they must learn to negotiate and follow these confusing guidelines.

Other directives were necessary to be successful, such as paying for a season’s entrance fee by subscription, but were not mandated. In some instances, admission fees were raised to limit attendance, but in most assembly rooms, admission was open to all who afford the price of a ticket. But for fashionable society, holding a subscription membership, that is, advance payment for a season, was the way to announce their arrival. Whether subscribing to balls, concerts, or assembly rooms, guests signed their names in a book that was open to the viewing of all visitors. After arriving in Tunbridge Wells, Mrs. Arlbery and Camilla visit the bookseller on the Pantiles, the fashionable shopping walkway. Realizing the importance of signaling her appearance, she pays half-a-guinea and places her name in the subscription books. In addition, when she visits the assembly room, she again pays half-a-guinea and adds her name to the list. Despite Camilla’s small amount of spending money, she follows Mrs. Arlbery’s example both times and writes her name in these fashion registers. Examining the books to learn who was in town became an important part of the regiment for fashionable society. As we see with
Sir Sedley and Lord Newford’s interest in scrutinizing these records, subscription books became a directory and an indispensable guide for fashionable society to see who was in town.

Figure 53. Pump Room in Bath.

“Undressed” Bathing at Bath

Despite the popularity of the Assembly Rooms in Bath, Burney never gives her readers or her characters, for that matter, a glimpse inside the elaborate, ornamented rooms. Instead, Evelina is the only female character even to see Bath, and when she does go, she only visits the Pump Room. However, this intriguing scene once again showcases women in a public amusement. As the focus on taking the waters shifted from medicinal purposes to bathing for pleasure and drinking the water for social purposes, the Pump Room was built directly above the bathing area
and opened its doors as the social center of Bath. The windows opened out over the public bathing area, and ogling over the bathers became a favorite pastime, especially for men to watch the women. Drinking the water, watching the bathers, parading around the room, and examining the subscription book to see who was in town, all helped to establish the Pump Room as the heart of fashionable activities. Burney chooses to showcase the Pump Room in Evelina’s experience in Bath (Figure 53).

As Evelina travels to Bath, escorted by Lord Orville and accompanied by his sister Lady Louisa and Mr. Lovel, Captain Mirvan and his daughter intercept their party and travel with them. After Evelina gives a minimal description of Bath’s landscape, she immediately turns her attention to the women she sees bathing from the Pump Room’s window (Figure 54). “At the pump-room, I was amazed at the public exhibition of the ladies in the bath: it is true, their heads are covered with bonnets, but the very idea of being seen, in such a situation, by whoever pleases to look, is indelicate” (393). While Hester Davenport argues that Burney participated in sea bathing, she never allows Evelina to participate because of the “instinctive modesty with which her creator endowed her” and that we “implicitly understand that the women’s wet dresses are clinging to their figures” (164). However, with Bath aiming to portray itself as a fashionable resort of refined manners, perhaps the “indelicacy” to which Burney refers could be an eighteenth-century meaning as unrefined or lacking in good taste. It appears that Evelina’s concern is not so much the “public exhibition” of women, but women appearing in such a manner that seems unrefined and that does not reflect fashionable conduct.
Interestingly, the conversation that ensues between Evelina and her companions focuses solely on the bathing women and what they are wearing. Exactly what they are wearing we are never told, but we learn from the foppish Mr. Lovel that the apparel is distasteful, or as he puts it, “frightful unbecoming” (393). Lady Louisa responds in a similar manner explaining that the reason she refuses to participate in public bathing is “because one can get no pretty dress for it” (393). Here in Evelina’s account of her one and only visit to Bath and to the Pump Room, she disregards the elaborate décor, skips drinking the water, and ignores the other myriad of objects that she could investigate. Instead, the element of voyeurism present among the company assembled in Burney’s Pump Room scene reveals that the object of attention is not the activities inside, but the women bathing and how they appear: in short, whether or not they appear fashionable.

Figure 54. Fashionable bathing at Bath.
With women in their finest fashionable attire, the pleasure gardens, assembly rooms, and spa resorts became a place of public display and a means by which those attending could obtain a gratifying sense of admiration. When Indiana dresses for her first assembly room ball, Miss Margland’s knowledge of fashionable society provides her with instructions on how “to set her person to the most advantage” among other “persons of fashion” (58). Indiana wants to attract Edgar’s attention because of the pathway his financial wealth can provide for her in the world of fashion. In order to do so, Miss Margland wants her to gain the attention of other male admirers. Because, as she explains, “when he sees a young lady admired and noticed by others, he falls naturally into making her the same compliment” (58). Indiana arrives “fluttering with all the secret triumph of conscious beauty” and walks around the room “through a crowd of admiring spectators” (60). The “splendor of Indiana’s appearance” causes her to receive this adoration, and her heart “beats with a pleasure wholly new, as she discovered that all surrounding her regarded her as the principal object” (61). Through Burney’s character Indiana, we see how fashionable amusements provide a place for women to display their fashionable attire and gain admiration from their male spectators. This illustration is not specific to this one particular scene. In fact, through Burney’s scenes in pleasure resorts, women who walk the circuit and display their fashionable attire gain this same attention and admiration.

Yet through all these public amusements, Burney’s female characters seem to gain empowerment and autonomy even when being objectified under the gaze of
male scrutiny. In *Evelina*, Lord Merton gives us valuable insight as to why he attends pleasure resorts. Mrs. Selwyn’s harsh rebuke to Lord Merton about his insistent inquiries into Evelina’s plans for evening entertainments and about her visit in Bristol Hotwells before returning to London evokes an enlightening response from him: “As to places…I am so indifferent to them, that the devil take me if I care which way I go! objects, indeed, I am not so easy about; and therefore I expect that those angels with whose beauty I am so much enraptured in this world will have the goodness to afford me some little consolation in the other” (274-75). This reaction reveals Lord Merton’s motivation for visiting such public amusements. It is not the *places*, but it is the *objects* that he sees and encounters at these popular sites that induce him to attend. Even though he may experience disappointment in the places he attends, he expects to be compensated and to find pleasure through the visual delights of fashionable ladies. The fact that he anticipates encountering attractive women implies the visibility of women as a prominent feature for finding pleasure and amusement in public diversions. In fact, Lord Merton unwittingly acknowledges that these women captivate him and induce him to follow them anywhere. While making themselves desirable objects and holding the gaze of male scrutiny, women gain a sense of empowerment as they become the main attraction and command a dominating presence.

One of the scenes in *Evelina* also addresses the design of the Pantheon as a spectator’s arena and an ideal place for women to become displayed as fashionable objects of desire. As Captain Mirvan, Sir Clement Willoughby, Mr. Lovel, and Lord Orville retire with the ladies to take tea beneath the Rotunda, the men question the
ladies’ opinion about the Pantheon and debate the pleasing aspects among themselves. Lord Orville begins by pointing out the merits of the architectural structure, but Lord Merton objects and questions: “…is there any eye here, that can find any pleasure in looking at dead walls or statues, when such heavenly living objects as I now see demand all their admiration?” (107). Orville agrees that the “lifeless symmetry of architecture” is certainly not a rival for the “animated charms of nature,” but sees no harm in admiring them together. Sir Willoughby, however, points out that when the eye of the beholder is guided by the desires of the heart, only one object will receive attention. Orville responds by confessing that he cannot “dispute the magnetic power of beauty, which irresistibly draws and attracts whatever has soul and sympathy” and declares that “though we have now no gods to occupy a mansion professedly built for them, yet we have secured their better halves, for we have goddesses to whom we all most willingly bow down” (107). Not surprisingly Burney’s representative of traditional condescending attitudes toward women, Captain Mirvan, scoffs at their responses and challenges Merton’s, Orville’s and Willoughby’s view. He sees the Pantheon as the dullest place ever constructed, and complains that as a previous connoisseur of “face-hunting” that he has not received any compensation for the price of his ticket because he has not seen “a face among them that’s worth half a guinea for a sight” (107).

What we see here, although from different points of view, is why men are attracted to pleasure resorts. It is not for the diversion in attending such places, but the women they hope to see. While Captain Mirvan’s derogatory remarks attempt to undermine the women who are present, he inadvertently reveals the reason he goes
to amusement gardens. It is the pleasure he receives from “face hunting.” In other words, knowing that he will encounter beautiful, fashionable ladies is what determines his desires and actions to attend. Lord Orville’s reply exposes the power that these women have over him. He invest women with “magnetic power,” a power that not only draws, but also controls the direction. Branding this power as irresistible also implies that men are actually powerless over their own actions. He even goes so far as to label fashionable ladies “goddesses” and calls them the “better half” of their partners, the “gods.” To this, he gives them the power over men, so much so, that men “willingly bow down” in submission. Here we see fashionable women placed in their “temples” or pleasure resorts and endowed with the power to control the actions of men. Even though they are objects of the male gaze, these spectacles of fashion subvert the power of the gaze. Agency becomes invested in this fashionably constructed lady, as the spectacle of fashion overwhelms the spectator. Whereas these pleasure resorts were considered the decorated ornaments of eighteenth-century emerging urban spaces, these women surface as ornaments of desire in the gardens and assembly rooms and find a sense of empowerment in their ability to make themselves visibly desirable and consequently the main attraction and the key source for pleasure.

Fashion, as Burney represents it, emerges as a source of social power that is indispensable as a site in which gender and class tensions play themselves out. Novel-writing provided a rare opportunity for Burney to contribute to the debate in an active way. She conveys her frustrations on the restrictive female condition, such as she experiences, and at the same time, she shows us emerging roles for women
that reflect their increasing public roles. Her works draw on the varied aspects of life she witnessed and give us absorbing attention to the detail of London’s social world and its obsession with the rise of fashion.

With the scopophilic interests ingrained in fashion and with the power invested in objects of attention, Burney shows us a femininity constructed on the public visibility of women. Rather than being passive vessels of a man’s wealth, Burney’s women use stylish apparel and fashionable venues to establish their own place in society. Burney takes seemingly trivial activities, activities often prohibited for women, and turns them into means of social agency. Whether women are shopping, dressing, riding in extravagant carriages, or walking the circuit in pleasure amusements, Burney’s women emerge as powerful agents of the social realm. These spectacles of fashion not only subvert eighteenth-century notions of femininity, but they also challenge the class structure embedded in patriarchal heritage. In seeing and being seen, Burney’s spectacles of fashion dominate the social realm of the beau monde. Fashion in Burney’s works not only manifests itself as a pathway to feminine agency, but it gives us a visible aspect of history and provides a material index of social change which help us to understand and imagine an era.

Notes


This medallion cost one guinea and is one of the most attractive artifacts to survive. There are approximately twenty different patterns depicting scenes and figures from classical mythology on one side, and the other side contains the engraved name of the subscriber. While the one shilling fee permitted socializing across class lines, the glitzy medallion offered a sense of social distinction.


Hembry also investigates Willowbridge Wells in Staffordshire: When a spring was discovered near her residence, the mother of a young earl named Digby sponsored the spa both for drinking and bathing. “She enclosed several springs in a stone bath-house with two large baths, one for men and the other not for women but for horses, which indicates the importance of horse transport in the economy of the spas. She also built a four-square stone conduit for drinking, and between 1676 and 1686, some rooms for lodging the poor and changing-rooms for bathers of higher rank” (72).


According to Wroth, “the rich seed and plum cakes, and the almond cheese-cakes…became a spécialité of the place” (95). According to Mollie Sands *The Eighteenth-Century Pleasure Gardens of Marylebone* “A rare print in the Harvard Theatre Collection (plate 10), dated 1760 by the experts, shows Miss Trusler as a plump young lady sitting in an armchair holding a glass of (presumably) brandy in her right hand; in front of her is a counter or sideboard upon which is what looks like a pastry tart or pie. Below is the verse: ‘Sov’reign of Cates, all hail! Nor thou refuse / This cordial offering from an English Muse / Who pours the brandy in Libation free / And finds Plumb Pudding realiz’d in Thee!"

“The Musical Address” was considered significant enough to be published in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*.


Eighteenth-century’s criticism charged that masquerades and public assemblies, such as Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and Marylebone, threatened female modesty and chastity. See James Bland’s *An Essay in Praise of Women: or A Looking-Glass for Ladies to See their Perfections In* (London: Printed for the author, 1733); Eliza Haywood’s *The Female Spectator*; and John Essex’s *The Young Ladies Conduct: or Rules for Education, Under Several Heads; With Instructions Upon Dress, Both Before and After Marriage. And Advice to Young Wives* (London: John Brotherton, 1722).
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

Critiques of female objectification have been foundational in feminist theory since its inception. Most assessments focus solely on the negative aspects of women as powerless, subordinated objects of male desire. Even the very act of acknowledging female objectivity or giving it any credibility appears problematic and seems to consent to or endorse a woman’s body as a source of male gratification. What most unfavorable criticism seems to dismiss, however, is the satisfaction or pleasure a woman can receive in knowing that she is being looked at. Only in the light of current debates and visual theory, such as Jonathan Crary proposes that reduces the observer’s authority, has any attention been given to analyzing women who intentionally and actively find pleasure and empowerment in soliciting the look.

By looking at Burney’s world of fashion, we see how fashion helps to construct a femininity based on appearance. With a few broad and suggestive strokes, Burney contextualizes her stories within the emerging practices of fashion. Using their beauty and desirability, her female characters place themselves on display. By having opportunities to court audiences, Burney’s women appropriate the gaze for their own pleasure and turn it to their own advantage. As Burney’s characters show us, a woman being looked at depends on her being in control of when and where she is seen. Through their experience of being seen, her women demonstrate that by using their bodies and exploiting the objectivity of fashion and fashionable venues, they get what they want.
What organizes Burney’s novels thematically and orchestrates the narrative is the impact that the fashion world has on a woman being seen. Without London’s social world and the importance it places on appearance, Burney’s women would have no means of capturing wealthy, worthy men’s attention, who have honorable intentions. Through their transformation from inexperienced, mostly orphaned, country girls into young ladies of fashion and through their experience of being seen, her heroines not only direct most of the narrative, but also are largely responsible for each male character’s actions.

Take Evelina for instance. Leaving her adopted country home, she becomes “Londonized” into fashionable circles. In spite of the wealthy Sir John Belmont’s refusal to acknowledge Evelina as his daughter and despite the fact that Evelina is not a lady of consequence, Orville does not waiver from his attraction and affection for Evelina. Kneeling before her, Orville pleads for her hand in marriage without the benefit of a dowry, other monetary assets, or even legitimacy. By this point, Evelina’s appearance has totally captivated Orville, and he has no choice but to propose to her anyway. Because of her changed appearance and her participation in London’s fashion world, Evelina secures a marriage proposal outside the aristocratic confines of class and without financial endowment. In short, Evelina not only escapes the country parsonage and avoids spinsterhood, but her altered appearance, which enhances her virtuous character, provides the means for her to marry the man of her own choice.

In a similar way, Cecilia, too, is a young orphaned woman living in seclusion in the country, but is thrust into London society. One aspect, however,
that distinguishes Cecilia from Evelina is that Cecilia stands to inherit a substantial estate from her uncle. This inheritance is replete with complications. One stipulation states that whomever she marries must be willing to assume her name. Burney creates a heroine without significant birth or rank, and a man must be willing to forfeit his own name and assume her common name. After moving to London, Cecilia attends a masquerade and captures the attention of aristocratic Mortimer Delvile. With the aristocracy’s obsession with birth, rank, and family, one would assume Mortimer would lose interest in Cecilia after he learns of her situation. With Cecilia, however, Burney unveils the fallacy of naturally inferior and powerless women who live under the domination of masculine control. In fact, Mortimer is so mesmerized by Cecilia that he defies his family, willingly forfeits his name and heritage, and marries Cecilia, despite the cost. Even when Cecilia’s childhood friend, Priscilla Harrel, incurs insurmountable debt in her obsession to keep up appearances and her husband commits suicide, Burney still does not punish Priscilla or keep her in seclusion from the fashion world. Instead, after a brief unhappy period away from her social circles, she, too, gets what she wants when she attracts the attention of another wealthy man and returns to London society.

Likewise, for Camilla, the reward of making herself a spectacle of fashion is an affluent, but submissive husband. This country parson’s daughter foregoes the restrictive lifestyle associated with tranquil domesticity. Instead, she follows her own inclinations and dresses in fashionable attire and travels with Mrs. Arlbery to fashion resorts. Her behavior brings her under the observation of Edgar
Mandlebert, a young well-to-do squire. Edgar secretly observes Camilla’s introduction into society, scrutinizes her participation in social circles, and critically misjudges her conduct. Along with the numerous male characters whom she also captivates, he follows her relentlessly from social event to resort towns. In the end, instead of Burney’s heroine regretting her behavior or reaping any negative repercussions or conforming to Edgar’s expectations of proper feminine behavior, Camilla emerges victorious and her participation in the social world is validated. Edgar admits his mistake and apologizes. His power as a male spectator is thwarted the moment Edgar admits his error, begs for Camilla’s forgiveness, and pleads with her to marry him.

In another example of female success, Camilla’s orphaned cousin Indiana certainly embodies the flawless appearance of femininity. She is described as a beauty of so regular cast, that her face had no feature, no look to which criticism could point as susceptible of improvement, or on admiration could dwell with more delight than on the rest. No statuary could have modeled her form with more exquisite symmetry; no painter have harmonized her complexion with greater brilliancy of colouring. (84)

After learning to dress in fashionable apparel, the mesmerizing Indiana presents to the social world an enchanting, beautiful, graceful physical body adorned with all the material trapping that fashion can possible offer. Indiana’s appearance captures the attention of many male spectators, and she even has the opportunity to reject numerous marriage proposals. In the end, the beautifully captivating Indiana has
her choice of available suitors and she chooses Macdersey, the son of a prosperous Irish landlord.

In stark contrast to her sister Camilla and cousin Indiana, Eugenia bears unsightly scars of smallpox and physical deformities from a crippling accident. Due to her lack of beauty and infirmities, her uncle, Sir Hugh, decides to provide her with a classical education and arrange a marriage for her to a university scholar. Sir Hugh’s plans for an alliance between Clermont and Eugenia fail when Clermont returns home from school to discover his betrothed physically deformed and more importantly—educated. He responds: “What have I to do with marrying a girl like a boy? That’s not my taste, my dear sir, I assure you. Besides, what has a wife to do with the classics? ...This learning is worse than her ugliness; ‘twould make me look like a dunce in my own house” (579). After Clermont’s rejection, Eugenia determines to live “in voluntary seclusion” (912). Eugenia’s physical defects and her classical education make her unfit and incapable of circulating in the social world. Burney’s depiction of Eugenia and her eventual isolation suggests that female success through education and improvement of the female mind are difficult to achieve in a social world fixated on appearance.

On a different level, influenced by the liberating ideals of the French Revolution, Elinor, an independently wealthy young woman unencumbered by financial concerns, radically proclaims equality for women. Her revolutionary outbursts about feminine equality, however, alienate her from fashionable ladies. In Elinor, Burney presents her most independent and defiant woman in any of her novels, and in essence, Elinor embodies feminine independence and equality. As
the spokeswoman for personal and political freedom, Elinor incurs social ridicule that results in her own alienation from society. Formerly engaged to Dennis Harleigh, she breaks her engagement to him after they disagree about the French Revolution. Afterwards, she proclaims her love for his brother, Albert Harleigh. In her rebellious way, she ignores social decorum and proposes marriage to Albert, of course, only to be rejected.

Both, Elinor’s embodiment of radicalized feminine equality and Eugenia’s model of female education, challenge the domestic image of femininity, but provoke the eighteenth-century’s hostile reactions to female identity linked to assumed masculine traits, independence and education. Both women are ostracized from society and are condemned to a life of isolation. In the social realm with its preoccupation with appearance and fashion, however, Burney’s fashionable females forge a pathway to female agency and autonomy. Burney’s depiction of her female characters suggests that in order for women to experience a sense of authority and control within the confines of a patriarchal system, they must embrace the power found in fashion and depend on their participation in social activities, which placed them in the heart of social power.

Nevertheless, I am certainly not suggesting that Burney opposed education for women or rejected independence for women that could be found in the principles of the French Revolution. I do think, however, she recognized that Georgian England was not ready for such radicalized approaches and that such portrayals of feminine agency would be dismissed and would be blatantly offensive. Instead, Burney manipulated the assumptions that associated appearance
and beauty with femininity. She recognized the power available through the social
realm and exploited the power of fashion to defy the containment of domesticity,
to thwart the woes of arranged marriages, and to resist the notions of matrimony
based solely within the confines of aristocratic rank.

To be sure, the dynamic relationship between seeing and being seen and
the interplay between attention and fashion are far from unique to Georgian
England. In fact, in many ways, Burney’s novels seem to anticipate the twenty-
first century with its advanced consumer economy. Her works prefigure a society
in which, to some degree, femininity is constructed through increasingly complex
practices of ornamentation and attention to fashion; a time in which a woman’s
image, publicity, and celebrity, such as we see in Madonna and Annie Sprinkle,
becomes extremely valuable; and a social world in which designer goods, cosmetic
enhancements, sports cars, cinematic productions, gala extravaganzas, and beauty
pageants, all place attention on the female adorned body. Regardless of whether
one embraces or rejects female objectification as a legitimate form of
empowerment, what remains clear is that the attention the female body attracts as a
spectacle of fashion continues to be a source not only of contention, but pleasure
as well.
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